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SONGLINES

Toumani Diabaté & Ballaké Sissoko
The story behind their classic album

Asmâa Hamzaoui
Morocco's female Gnawa ambassador

Free album download on page 42

THE LATIN QUARTER

Ana Tijoux
Los Tigres del Norte
Buenos Aires Unrest!
Guide to Fruko

BALOJI

Getting under the skin of modern Africa with the Cannes-conquering Congolese-Belgian musician and auteur

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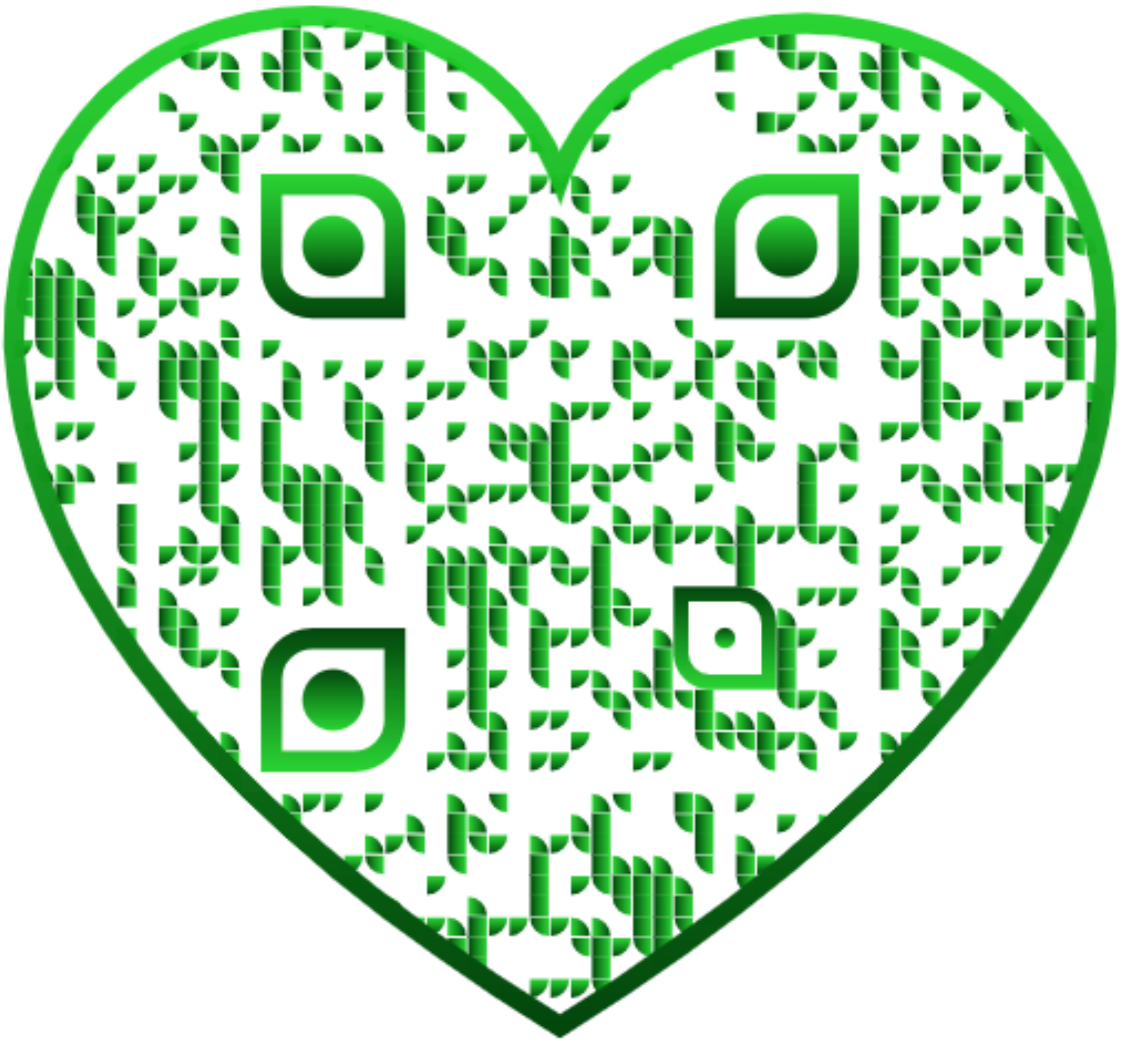

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This year's Grammys included the first ever category for African music, with the Best African Music Peformance title going to South Africa's Tyla. Quite understandably, considering all the nominations were from Nigeria and South Africa, and either entirely or largely in English, it has led some to question how representative the awards are. But then, isn't that a question we should be asking across all of the categories? Do the Grammys measure anything other than success? Are they anything more than a marketing tool and expensive night out for the industry? Are we really expecting its members to trawl through African releases to find those that are groundbreaking or represent the region in some unique or beautiful way, or are they just going to plump for the big hitters on the big labels? On Facebook, Rhiannon Giddens wrote that she didn't attend this year's ceremony because on top of the crazy expense of getting oneself to the event, you now have to pay $1,200 to take anyone with you.

Independent, new and niche musicians are getting pushed out. Spotify is not helping. As of this year, they will no longer pay for tracks that are streamed less than 1,000 times over a 12-month period, saying that these tracks *'only represent 0.5% of total streams and royalties generated'* and applauding the fact that tens of millions of extra dollars will now go to the 99.5% of streams that are eligible. In other words, Taylor Swift will now earn 0.5% more millions from streaming and hundreds of thousands of musicians will no longer receive their tiny, but at least existent, payouts.

Then, we get to the news of Condé Nast subsuming *Pitchfork* into *GQ*, a move which has led to the dismissal of most of *Pitchfork*'s editors and senior writers and has had many tolling the death knell for music media. This is after similar cutbacks or farewells for Bandcamp, *gal-dem*, *Q* and others.

But, what does this mean for *Songlines*? If anything, it means we have to keep doing what we are doing, and more than ever focus on supporting musicians. It's even had me wondering whether we need to get rid of the negative review, as when there is so much music available and so many musicians are struggling, should we be using our limited space on savaging those brave enough to try and make ends meet? Or maybe I'm just getting soft. I'd love to know your thoughts on that.

This issue, with its extensive preview of albums coming out this year, is our way of trying to balance the news feeds. There are good things happening too; it will take more than all this to stop the music.

Russ Slater Johnson, Editor

CONTRIBUTORS THIS ISSUE INCLUDE

Daniel Spicer
A writer, broadcaster, improviser and poet, Daniel is author of *Turkish Psychedelic Music Explosion*. On p17 he speaks to LAIR, an Indonesian band labelled as psych but, as he discovers, their style runs deeper.

Megan Iacobini de Fazio
A freelance journalist, Megan spent five years working in East Africa. Now living in Rome, her work focuses on migration, women's rights and music. She talks to Saïd Tichiti about his latest release on p14.

Nigel Williamson
Previously a political correspondent and then news editor on *The Times*, Nigel has written for every issue of *Songlines*. He chats to Michael Volpe on p66 about opera, South African pop and Genesis.

Songlines was launched in 1999 and is the definitive magazine for world music – music that has its roots in all parts of the globe, from Mali to Mexico, India to Iraq. Whether this music is defined as traditional, contemporary, folk or fusion, *Songlines* is the only magazine to truly represent and embrace it. However, *Songlines* is not just about music, but about how the music fits into the landscape; it's about politics, history and identity. Delivered in both print and digital formats, *Songlines*, through its extensive articles and reviews, is your essential and independent guide to a world of music and culture, whether you are starting on your journey of discovery or are already a seasoned fan.

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34 Asmâa Hamzaoui

Wael Ben Abbou

17 Take Note: LAIR

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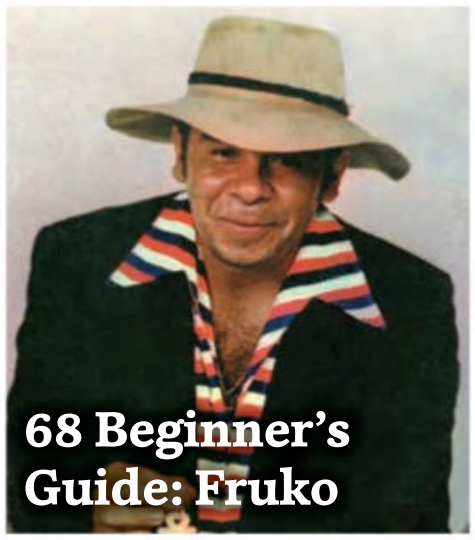

68 Beginner's Guide: Fruko

Courtesy of Discos Fuentes

UPFRONT

06 Top of the World

08 The Source
Toumani Diabaté & Ballaké Sissoko, Celtic Connections, Catriona Price, Saïd Chalaban, Zaho de Sagazan, LINA_

11 Introducing
Delasi

17 Take Note
LAIR

20 Spotlight
Katherine Priddy

22 Simon Says

23 Letters

FEATURES

26 **Baloji**

30 **2024 Preview**

34 **Asmâa Hamzaoui**

36 **Ana Tijoux**

40 **A Tapestry of Sacred Music**

REVIEWS

42 Africa

46 Americas

50 Europe

57 Middle East

58 Asia & Pacific

60 Fusion

REGULARS

66 My World
Michael Volpe

68 Beginner's Guide
Fruko

71 Dispatch from
Buenos Aires, Argentina

72 Gig Guide

76 Festival Guide

79 Fireside Stories
Los Tigres del Norte

81 **Eliza Carthy**'s
News of the Whirl

82 Essential 10
Greek Folk Albums

"I am privileged. There are no bombs falling over me, my children are healthy, there is food on the table"

Ana Tijoux, Chile's foremost female rapper discusses the inspiration of her new, joy-focussed album on p36

TOP OF THE WORLD

On this issue's compilation – our curated selection of new music and bonus tracks from across the globe

TOP OF THE WORLD TRACKS

01 **Aziza Brahim** 'Haiyu ya Zuwar'

From *Mawja* on Glitterbeat Records

Brahim reinvigorates a song of Sahrawi resistance to the occupation of Morocco in the Western Sahara. Raúl Rodríguez' guitar provides a distinctively Spanish flair beneath the searing vocals. **See 43**

02 **Giuliano Gabriele** 'Basta!'

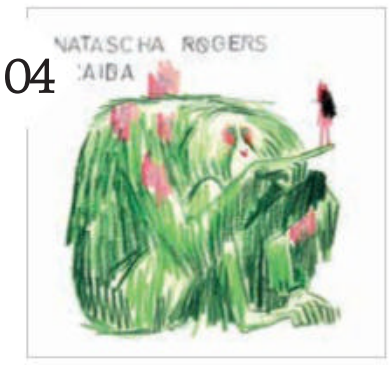
From *Domino!* on Coming MusicArt / InOuïe Distribution

Off-kilter violin starts this *pizzica* tune in eerie, upbeat style, before Gabriele's gruff voice and virtuoso accordion join the fray, building a magnificently rich and beguiling South Italian-inspired soundscape. **See p51**

03 **Abdul & The Gang** 'Oran Drive'

From *Kasbatek* on Abou Bakre Bensalem / Z Production

Hypnotic 'Gnawa funk': synth-conjured swirls, infectious rhythms, psychedelic keys and velvety smooth trumpet come courtesy of The Gang, while Abdul's forceful Arabic vocals cut to the core. **See p60**



04 **Natascha Rogers** 'O Baba'

From *Onaida* on NØ FØRMAT!

Drawing on her peripatetic, far-reaching past, Rogers folds Afro-Cuban rhythms into an uplifting piano-led melody, with her infectious, flying chorus leading above all. **See p47**

05 **Dieuf-Dieul de Thiès** 'Djirim'

From *Dieuf-Dieul de Thiès* on Buda Musique

Back after splitting in 1983, Dieuf-Dieul deliver dirty brass riffs, tinny percussion, gritty electric guitar and warm, soul-filling vox buoyed by an infectious West African groove. **See p44**

06 **LINA_** 'Que Ninguem Me Veja Ver-Vos'

From *Fado Camões* on Galileo Music

With Justin Adams in the producer's chair, the *fadista* extraordinaire renders Luís Vaz de Camões' poetry of desire with customary passion. **See p53**

07 **La Bottine Souriante** 'La Wagine'

From *Domino!* on Studio B-12

A wonderfully frenetic call-and-response on lasting love, featuring *turlutte* (the vocal imitation of fiddle lines) and irresistible *podorhythmie*. As the chorus commands, '*jump in!*.' **See p46**

08 **Arushi Jain** 'Our Touching Tongues'

From *Delight* on Leaving Records

Electronica and Hindustani sounds converge, as Jain's ephemeral incantations anoint the listener's ear via a reverb-saturated prism of glittering techno ambience. **See p63**

09 **Carwyn Ellis & Rio 18** 'Gair o Gysur'

From *Ni A Nhw* on Bubblewrap Collective

This wonderfully tender ukulele-led tune, initially released digitally as a fundraiser during COVID, finally gets the attention it deserves on Ellis' latest collection of Welsh-language cuts. **See p50**

10 **Hizbut Jámm** 'Caada Gi'

From *Hizbut Jámm* on Instant Classic

Raphael Rogiński's 'Brotherhood for Peace' vamp it up in fine style, as skittering *kora* runs patter like summer rain and eruptions of scalding axe fury ride jazzy West African-inspired polyrhythms. **See p61**

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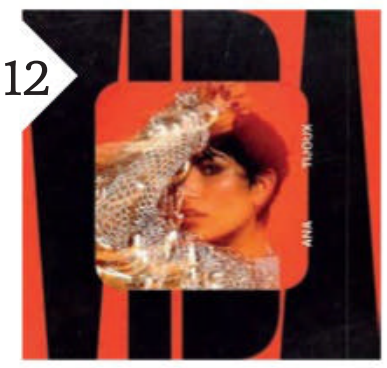
+ BONUS TRACKS

11 **Sam Lee**
'Bushes and Briars'
From *songdreaming* on Cooking Vinyl

Sam Lee gives his own interpretation to the heartbreaking folk song dating back to 1912. Through his conservationist's perspective, he imagines the pain of losing not a lover, but a species. **See p52**



12 **Ana Tijoux**
'Tania'
From *Vida* on Victoria Producciones

The Chilean superstar returns after a nine-year hiatus. This paean to her late sister mixes uplifting *cumbia* and ska rhythms with Tijoux's silky singing and rapping – celebratory and mournful in one. **See p36**

13 **Delasi**
'Amplifier (feat Nii Noi Nortey)'
From *Audacity of Free Thought* on Brownswood Recordings

From the Ghanaian singer/rapper come laid-back hip-hop beats chattering beneath impressionistic brass and his vehement lyrical delivery. **See p11**

14 **LAIR**
'Setan Dolbon (feat Monica Hapsari)'
From *Ngélar* on Guruguru Braiin

Inspired by the group's West Java home town, LAIR's rattling acid-fried rock finds its perfect foil in Hapsari's piercing vocals. **See p17**

15 **Katherine Priddy**
'First House on the Left'
From *The Pendulum Swing* on Cooking Vinyl

Gentle acoustic undulations introduce Priddy's musings on her Brummie childhood home, filled with heartfelt contemplations of stories past, present and future. **See p20**

Dom Tyler

" I thought, 'how does one take that context of an old folk love song, a broken-hearted song, and transfer it... looking at not just an individual but a species, and a whole ecosystem?'"

Turn to p52 to hear conservationist and singer Sam Lee talk about why he decided to cover the folk song 'Bushes and Briars'

TOP OF THE WORLD ALBUM DOWNLOAD

To download our *Top of the World* compilation please visit https://bit.ly/SLTOTW196 or use the QR code to the left.

Ballaké Sissoko (left) and Toumani Diabaté (right) during the recording session on September 22, 1997

21 Strings

With Toumani Diabaté and Ballaké Sissoko's epochal New Ancient Strings to be reissued for its 25th anniversary, Tim Cumming speaks to Lucy Durán, the album's producer, about the unique recording and about her documentary with Ballaké tracing the history of the kora

Let's start where it really begins. Not in Joe Boyd's London office, negotiating the terms of engagement with fast-rising star Toumani Diabaté; nor when a young Lucy Durán walked into Grove Music on Bedford Square one morning, entered the office of Mr Anthony King, Grove's recently appointed '*advisor for African music*' and heard the *kora* for the first time; nor in the cavity of a mighty baobab tree on Gambia's coast, where a *djinn* [spirit] first dreamt of an instrument with 21 strings, not the six of the hunter's lyre. No, where it really begins is in the headphones of producer Nick Parker, who was used to recording harpsichords and chamber ensembles, not two West African *griots* sat in the vestibule of a conference centre on the '*north bank of the Niger*.' Marble floor, marble walls, high marble ceiling; two players – Toumani Diabaté, Ballaké Sissoko, two Nagra recorders, four mics. And, as Parker was about to start recording, the chirrup of a lone, unseen cricket.

"Nick was the one with headphones, and was the only who could hear it, so we spent at least an hour chasing it around the vestibule," recalls producer and broadcaster Lucy Durán. "We couldn't kill it – that would be a bad omen." They finally got it out, using broomsticks.

If you go to the British Library, where the original, unedited tapes of *New Ancient Strings* are stored, perhaps you can hear that cricket, picked up on those four mics set around the two young players before they started playing on that balmy night of September 22, 1997, the anniversary of Mali's independence. They would go on to record eight pieces, including one of the oldest in the kora repertoire, 'Bi Lamban', thought to date from the 13th century. Durán and Parker would later choose from the three or so takes they did of each – usually the second or last take – and aside from a few editorial snips, where they were noodling around with a riff for too long in preparation for those take-offs into transcendent realms for which the kora seems to have been devised and divined, what you hear is what they played. "There's nothing additional," says Durán of the album, which after many years of being out of print, has been remastered for reissue by Chrysalis, with new notes by Durán. "There were no overdubs, no added reverb," she adds. "But there was something in the simplicity in the way we recorded. They were very relaxed, unselfconscious. It wasn't a studio. They weren't wearing headphones. They were listening to each other, sat next to each other. I think they went into a zen moment, where they weren't even looking at each other. They were just listening and going for it."

Durán first met a 19-year-old Ballaké Sissoko in 1986, on her first trip to West Africa, with the writer James Fox. Their trip was paid for by a generous commission from *House & Garden*, even if it involved arduous

Lucy Durán

The two *koras* were captured using just four microphones at Bamako's Palais de Congrés

travel by road and on a goods train through Senegal before a 2am arrival in Bamako.

"We finally came to the house of Toumani Diabaté," recalls Durán. "He and Ballaké were living either side of one wall," she adds. Their fathers, Sidiki and Djelimadi, had been gifted land by Mali's first president right there under the presidential hill. Their 1970 recording, *Ancient Strings*, had been issued by Mali's ministry of culture, and was the inspiration for the album their sons would record that September night, 27 years later, and which is now back in print, 25 years after its release.

Durán's first ambition had been to bring Toumani to the studio with his father, to strike new gold from those 'Ancient Strings'. That dream ended with Sidiki's unexpected death, aged 73, in Gambia.

"That's when I thought of Toumani and Ballaké," says Durán. "The same generation but quite different styles and histories." Comparing them, you have Toumani's filigree flights into the ether, while Ballaké holds the guy ropes of rhythm. "His role was to keep the riff going," says Durán. "He is brilliant at very funky basslines. Listen to 'Bi Lamban', which is in praise of music itself. Two minutes in, something changes and Ballaké really goes into it. That was his forte."

Today, Ballaké can elevate and fly between the sun and moon just as Toumani could, and it could be argued that his current standing on the global stage is as high, if not higher, than his old friend's. So it seems right that it was to Ballaké that Durán turned when she began *Kora Tales*, her film about the history and journey of the kora, co-directed with Laurent Benhamou.

"I wanted to do it with someone from the culture, a player who would really look at the trajectory and history of the kora," says Durán. "There are a thousand stories about it, and there's no one truth. So, I wanted to tell that story through Ballaké."

As one kora maker says in the film, "Every family will tell you a different story to authenticate themselves." And through the fog of make-believe, in truth it probably dates to the 18th century, emerging from much older instruments such as the six-string hunter's harp. "When did that happen, and how, we don't know."

Ballaké and the film travel down through Senegal, and the Casamance, before reaching the semi-mythological source of the kora and its many tales of origin, Sanementereng, a sacred coppice of baobab trees overlooking the many-plaited waves riding the currents and tides of the Atlantic, near the beach town of Brufut. "It was an emotional experience. Ballaké had been talking about it so much," recalls Durán. "We filmed him in front of the baobab" – in legend, the tree from which a djinn revealed the secrets of the kora – "and he was visibly moved."

Durán and the crew were, too, as Ballaké knelt for ablution, a blessing of water from the sacred well at the foot of the baobab coppice, the camera slowly rising up to meet the majestic enormity of the ocean playing its deep, resonant strings of currents and waves, of the moon-heavy tides on which the cruel trade in human beings, as well as the wonders of so much African music, plied their ways back and forth across the world.

***+ New Ancient Strings** is being reissued by Chrysalis on CD and vinyl (both with 16-page booklet) on March 15. **Ballaké Sissoko: Kora Tales** is currently being screened at select festivals and cinemas*

THIRTY TIGERS SUPER PRIZE BUNDLE

We have a crazy bundle to celebrate our 25th anniversary thanks to the record label Thirty Tigers. The bundle includes 25 releases from the esteemed label, which is too many titles to mention in full here (see songlines.co.uk/competitions for details) but includes releases on vinyl or CD by Béla Fleck, Corinne Bailey-Rae, Lucinda Williams, Darlingside and a very special copy of John Prine's limited 7" collection *The Oh Boy Singles Boxset*.

WIN

To win these 25 releases, answer: Béla Fleck's latest album *Rhapsody in Blue* pays homage to which US composer?

See p23 for competition rules

THE **GLOBE** AT A **GLANCE**

AFRICA: Not for the faint-hearted, Lord Spikeheart has founded HAEKALU RECORDS, a new label dedicated to *'the heaviest music from the Continent.'*... **AUSTRALIA:** Research by John Smith of the University of New South Wales found that the best didgeridoos are those with weak resonances, as this allows for the player to dominate the timbre of the instrument with their own vocal tract... **FRANCE:** The French Ministry of Culture is set to confirm a proposed tax of 1.75% on the earnings of streaming platforms such as Spotify and Deezer, with the money going to the country's National Center for Music... **GERMANY:** Bavarian Prime Minister Markus Söder has told his CSU party that Germany's radio orchestras should be halved and that public radio and television stations should be abolished or merged... **JAMAICA:** Aston 'Family Man' Barrett (1946-2024), former bass player with Bob Marley, has died aged 77. Barrett became Marley's bandleader from *Natty Dread* onwards; he also recorded with Burning Spear, Alpha Blondy and Augustus Pablo... **LEBANON:** Beirut and Beyond have announced a new compilation, *Beirut and Beyond: 10 Years Compilation* (pictured) which will feature ten tracks from contemporary Lebanese artists. A crowdfunding campaign (bit.ly/beirut10) is raising funds for a vinyl pressing and to promote the album... **UK:** A report from UK Parliament, *Misogyny in Music*, has laid bare the music industry's inequalities, stating: *'Women working in the music industry face limitations in opportunity, a lack of support, gender discrimination and sexual harassment and assault as well as the persistent issue of unequal pay in a sector dominated by self-employment and gendered power imbalances.'* The Government has two months to respond to the report's recommendations.

SOI

Without Zakir, We Are Nothing

Zakir Hussain came away with three Grammys at this year's awards, winning Best Global Music Album with Shakti for *This Moment*, and two gongs related to *As We Speak*, his album with Béla Fleck, Edgar Meyer and Rakesh Chaurasia. After winning for *As We Speak*, he told the audience: "without love, without music, without harmony, we are nothing."

Nação Zumbi

From Ana to Zumbi, it's La Linea 24

Latin Music's home away from home, the London La Linea festival, has announced its 2024 line-up. This April, venues across the city will host a variety of big names including Lila Downs, Ana Tijoux, Los Tigres del Norte, Fruko & The Bonita House Band, Domenico Lancelloti & Ricardo Dias Gomes, Nação Zumbi and La Yegros. Tickets and details at lalineafestival.com.

Alice Randall

Keren Trevino

Girls Ride Horses Too

The songs of songwriter, author and academic Alice Randall have been recorded by a host of strong Black female voices including Rhiannon Giddens, Sunny War, Leyla McCalla and Alice's daughter Caroline Randall Williams. The recording, *My Black Country* (to be released April 12), aims to reclaim and reinstate the Black stories integral to the history of country and blues.

Feeling Purplish

Purplish Records, a new label from Mdou Moctar collaborator Mikey Coltun, has released its first batch of tapes. *Batch #1 – Family* contains one ten-track tape, *Sol*, by Koltun, and a second, *Akaline*, with seven tracks from Abdoulaye & Ahmoudou, Niger's *'Tuareg superstar guitarists.'* Purplish will continue to release tapes in batches, with '*artists paired... from different parts of the world.*'

IT'S HAPPENING

FORT WORTH AFRICAN AMERICAN ROOTS MUSIC FESTIVAL (March 16) will feature Lilli Lewis, Corey Harris and others... To the west, **FOCUS WALES** (May 9-11) excites as Angeline Morrison, Deerhoof, Melin Melyn and Aleighcia Scott are just some of the names announced... Blending Arabic traditional sounds with jazz rock, **SARĀB** (May 19-22) prepare to tour the UK and The Netherlands ... **BLACK DEER FESTIVAL** (June 14-16) is shaking Kent up: Sheryl Crow, Hermanos Gutiérrez, Muireann Bradley, Luke Combs and more are set to hit its stages... **ARTHUR VEROCAI** (June 28) will play the Barbican with Nu Civilisation Orchestra... **NORTH SEA JAZZ FESTIVAL** (July 12-14) will host acts including Irakere, Ibrahim Maalouf and Amaro Freitas... **AFRICA OYÉ** (July 19-21) has announced its dates, with a line-up coming soon... **SPEYFEST** (July 19-21) is hosting Breabach, Sharon Shannon, Tide Lines and others... Exciting names are playing **CAMBRIDGE FOLK FESTIVAL** (July 25-28): Robert Plant, Aoife O'Donovan, Fantastic Negrito, Katherine Priddy, Peggy Seeger, Nitin Sawhney are just some... **WE OUT HERE FESTIVAL** (August 15-18) will feature Corinne Bailey Rae, Bala Desejo and Obongjayar among others... **FANFARE CIOCĂRLIA** (October 9-13) are touring the UK this October

LOS BUENOS

Currently on the Songlines stereo...

Afro Celt Sound System 'Magical Love'
Featuring Ríoghnach Connolly and Djekoria Fanta, this slow-grooving single, teasing a new album, is a heck of a return to form for the fusion favourites.

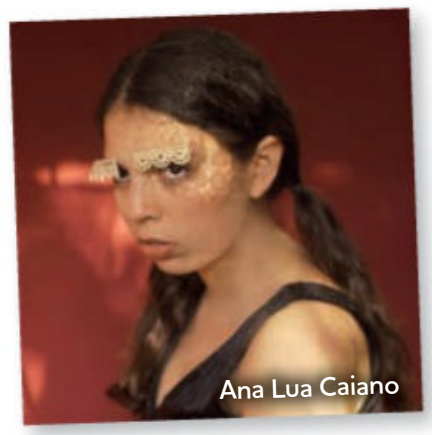
Ana Lua Caiano 'O Bicho Anda Por Aí'
A dance-inducing taste of the debut to come. Rapid rhythms, synth snares and layered, crisp vocals exemplify Caiano's grasp of electronica and traditional songcraft.

Leyla McCalla 'Scaled to Survive'
A dreamy, poetic single, contemplating connection to our parents, from McCalla's upcoming album.

Nick Mulvey 'Freedom Now'
Mulvey teamed up with Arooj Aftab & Golshifteh Farahani for a life-affirming ode against tyranny with profits going to Choose Love, a charity supporting refugees and displaced peoples.

La Batucada Guaricha 'La Putana'
An astonishing tribute to Ana, an early 20th-century Colombian sex worker who formed a union to end local workers' exploitation.

Avalanche Kaito 'Lago'
Kaito Winse's vocals fly furious in this riotous, clashing, discordant and delightful single unpacking *griot* thinking.



Ana Lua Caiano

Joana Caiano

Delasi

Erin Cobby speaks to the Ghanaian producer who has finally found an eclectic home, and his voice, after years of adversity and toil

When I catch up on Zoom with Ghana-based producer, singer and rapper Delasi, he's two and a half hours north of the city of Koforidua. With mountains, springs and birdsong all around him, I lament that his surroundings are far superior to my view of a south-east London post office. Delasi does not disagree, telling me how he loves his environment so much that it often makes it into his songs.

"If the birdsong is artistic enough, I leave it in for ambience," he says while detailing his recording process. "Sometimes I even listen back to a song and hear crickets even though I followed all the protocol!" Delasi seems to be all about what's natural. "I was born into music," he explains. "Artists say they were singing in the womb – that could have been me, but I don't have the scans to check," he laughs. Ultimately, he credits his love of music to his dad, with his eclectic soundtracking of Delasi's school runs awarding him the moniker of Delasi's "first DJ."

It was during these singalongs to tracks as diverse as those from the *Doctor Zhivago* musical or by the The Everly Brothers, that Delasi realised he was terrible at singing other people's songs. Not letting this faze him, he decided to start writing his own, and he spent his teenage years honing his craft in various studios. Collaborations with the likes of Reggie Rockstone and D-Black helped him become, as he puts it: "a pretty dope rapper with some notoriety." At this point his tracks were chiefly influenced by hip-hop artists like Nas and Tupac.

Delasi's latest release, *The Audacity of Free Thought*, is a little different. "As my grey [hairs] come, my dad's influence is coming back," he explains when I ask him the reasoning behind the eclectic genre exploration on the EP. "I want more mellow stuff now", he continues, "hip-hop is like the bread; soul, the meat; and jazz, the salad. Together you get a great club sandwich."

The genre isn't the only thing different about this release. In fact, as Delasi's last project came out in 2015, it's a whole new world. He gives "unprintable adversity" as the reason for his long hiatus, but the story for his return is more relatable.

After a negative experience with a producer – ("some producers are from hell") – an artist residency in Morocco afforded him the time and space to get creative again and learn a new skill. "I decided to embrace the thing that scared me. Now I have production credits on almost every track on the EP."

When he returned, Delasi needed to get the project out, but after so long spent removed from the game, he wasn't sure of his best course. "I needed a strong mother to guide me," he says. And he found it in Gilles Peterson's Brownswood Recordings. Of the signing he says, "The euphoria is good, it's also about looking at the roster and seeing folks that are just as eclectic as I am. I've got some great siblings."

As we look to the future, I ask Delasi what excites him. Apart from a wish for a *COLORS* [online video platform] feature, it's collaborating with the people he now finds himself surrounded by at Brownswood. Quite the upgrade from birds and crickets.

***+ The Audacity of Free Thought** is out on Brownswood Recordings. 'Amplifier' is on this issue's compilation, track 13*

Charles Lawson

Glasgow's Winter Warmer

Jo Frost reports from ***Celtic Connections*** *where an astonishing 300 shows were staged in Glasgow through January and into February*

As I headed up to Glasgow for my annual fix of Celtic musical cheer, the talk on the train was whether or not there would be ticket touts for Rura & the olllam's sold-out gig at Barrowland Ballroom. Such is the popularity of Europe's biggest winter festival that the event takes over the city for 18 nights, in 25 venues and a third of the 300 concerts sell out.

I eased myself into festival mode gently with a concert called *Lev's Violin* at the City Halls. Part talk, part history lecture, part concert, it was a curious rambling affair, hosted by classically trained violinist, composer and conductor Greg Lawson. The violin in question was loaned to Lawson by a friend, the Russian-born musician Lev Atlas. Lawson is an engaging storyteller and the anecdotes about the violin, its likely origin, previous owners, disrepair then restoration came thick and fast, interspersed with a slideshow, a reading by the author Helena Attlee from her book (also entitled *Lev's Violin*) and of course, some tunes played by Lawson, his Moishe's Bagel former bandmate Phil Alexander and Atlas himself. The evening could have benefitted from more structure – and ideally more music. But Lawson is a consummate entertainer, whether playing or talking ("I'm a Geordie, we like to tell stories," he quipped), so, my interest piqued, I bought the book and look forward to the next instalment.

The aforementioned sold-out show at the Barrowlands was just one of several at this iconic venue in the East End of the city. It's been ten years since the olllam's last appearance in Glasgow and the band's excitement was on a par with the audience's, who gave a uproarious welcome to the newest member – and local lad – Ross Ainslie, who seemed to effortlessly fill Tyler Duncan's shoes alongside the masterful piping of John McSherry.

The international industry networking event Showcase Scotland runs concurrently for five days and this year's international partner was Norway who showcased six diverse groups, ranging from the dreamy electro-folk-pop of Ævestaden, master Hardanger fiddler Alexander Aga Røynstrand and the Sámi *joik* of Gabba. The most raucous band were Gangar, whose influences include the Swedish folk-rockers Hoven Droven and AC/DC. "They're like a Norwegian Spinal Tap," one delegate behind me remarked, clearly not overly enthralled by their head-banging, high kicks and devil-horn antics. But they were an undeniable hit, with their frontman and Hardanger fiddler Mattias Thedens encouraging everyone to join them for their trademark 'Tre Danser' (Tree Dance). The sparkle levels notched up considerably with the next act, Kinnaris Quintet, the fabulous fiddles, guitar and mandolin five-piece who manage to combine finesse and glamour without any compromise on superb musicianship. When special guests Julie Fowlis and Karine Polwart joined them onstage, there were audible gasps of excitement from the crowd who joyfully sang along to renditions of Massive Attack's 'Teardrop' and 'Read All About It' by Emile Sandé. A hugely enjoyable evening and resounding proof that Celtic Connections is the perfect antidote to the January blues. *JO FROST*

Clockwise from top: the olllam with John McSherry at the fore; Rura's Steven Blake; Karine Polwart guests with Kinnaris' Fiona MacAskill; Greg Lawson with Lev's violin

Chantal Guevara

WIN

To win, tell us: what is the name of Divanhana's last, *Songlines Music Award*-winning, album?

See p23 for competition rules

CPL-MUSIC BUNDLE

We have a fine prize bundle from the good people at CPL-Music, specialists in music from the Balkans, Eastern Europe and elsewhere. In total, we have four CDs from their catalogue to give away: Divanhana's *Zavrzlama*, Baklava's *From Skopje with Love*, Alice in WonderBand's *Rikataka (New Balkan Rhythm)* and *Great Tunes from the World Music Charts Europe*, a double CD compilation of tracks by Tamikrest, Lakou Mizik, Lina_Raül Refree, Tigana Santana and many others.

The Last Leg

***Catriona Price** heads to Chile for the final leg of her Routes to Roots project, connecting with the Mapuche and finding inspiration in schoolchildren*

Left: Daniela Millaleo (L) with her *cultrún* and Catriona Price; Above: Catriona with students of the Escuela de Música Enrique Soror

The Mexican leg of our Routes to Roots development journey drew to a close with a very different Christmas. Dancing, playing tunes on a Caribbean beach and inventing a Mexican twist on the traditional Scottish dessert *cranachan* (using *mezcal* in the absence of whisky) were definitely festive firsts for me!

A few days later we found ourselves welcoming in the new year in Santiago de Chile. We began our Chilean leg with a wonderful week of workshops at Escuela de Música Enrique Soro, a music school on the outskirts of Santiago providing free music lessons to the community. Our creative and energetic participants allowed me to further develop a brand-new workshop methodology through the creation of our collaborative piece 'Pailalen' (a Mapuche word for stargazing).

In the future, my idea is that Routes to Roots artists will co-lead these community workshops, encouraging young and amateur musicians to explore their creativity within the context of the culture surrounding them. These will run alongside the professional Routes to Roots co-writing sessions, inspiring deeper connection to creativity through cultural exchange for both the workshop participants and the professional artists.

My first Chilean collaboration was with the brilliant bassist, singer and rapper Giancarlo Valdebenito of Santiago group La Plaza del Puma. We decided to write something with children who had been affected by the war in Gaza. The perspective of young people is often given less importance by those in power, simply because they have been on the planet for a shorter amount of time. But the thing about kids is they are not ruled by their egos. Their thoughts and feelings on the world are purer and often more genuine. There is so much we can learn from young people.

We wrote 'No Saben Nada' (They Know Nothing) in Giancarlo's Santiago studio and filmed it the following day in a wine cellar at the beautiful Perez Cruz Vineyard.

Our fifth and final collaboration took place in the lush Los Ríos region in the south of Chile. It is a priority that Indigenous cultures feature prominently in Routes to Roots. Indigenous communities are not given enough of a platform, and we can learn so much from their rich traditions and respect for the earth. So, I was thrilled when the wonderful Mapuche singer Daniela Millaleo agreed to work with us.

We created our collaboration in the small town of Panguipulli with its beautiful lake and smoking volcanos. Daniela played us her *cultrún* (a Mapuche ceremonial drum) and we immediately knew it had to be a part of our composition. Filming our new song 'En el Sur' (In the South) beside the sound of a river felt like we had a third musician there. The lyrics Daniela wrote speak of respect for the nature of the south, the lifeblood the water brings and our need to defend the earth.

It was a privilege to work with Giancarlo and Daniela in Chile, and Coyo Licatzin, Pahua and El Guapo in Mexico – these five acts' varying cultural influences, each bringing a special and very different musical expression, have enabled us to build a diverse, vibrant initial body of work for Routes to Roots. I couldn't be more grateful to them for being a part of our first chapter. On a personal note, I feel lucky to have had these amazing musical encounters. Each one has taught me something different and expanded my musical horizons. And of course, given me beautiful new friendships.

Our time in Latin America has been transformative for Routes to Roots and my head is buzzing with ideas for the future. Our five new songs will be released as live videos in the spring and we are hard at work sourcing funding for future activity. Reflecting on this journey has me more convinced than ever that the sharing of art and culture can help communities listen to and understand each other better, getting us back to communicating on a more human level. It feels like we are at the start of something with endless possibilities, armed with the myriad experiences, knowledge and vibrancy that Mexico and Chile gifted us.

+ *Follow **Routes to Roots** on Instagram/ Facebook (@routestorootsmusic) and via routestorootsmusic.org*

Diego Ramos

Echoes of the Sahara

Saïd Tichiti goes back to his roots on new EP Jarama

"There is no conservatism in African music, people have always been moving around and connecting their own traditions with others," says Hungarian-Moroccan musician Saïd Tichiti. "I see it as a richness, not a danger." Nothing embodies this ethos more than the music he's been making with Chalaban, the ensemble he founded in 1999 in Budapest: across their six albums, the group blend the propulsive, trancey grooves of Gnawa with electric guitars, Afrobeat rhythms and flourishes of Hungarian folk melodies.

His new EP *Jarama*, under the name Saïd Chalaban, similarly leaves space for fusion and experimentation, but delves deeper into the music of the Hassani, the Bedouin Arab tribe who settled in North Africa and the Sahara in the 11th century. Tichiti and his Hungarian bandmates distil the sprawling, hypnotic Hassani concerts — where musicians set the tones and poets come up with lyrics on the spot, weaving expansive songs that are not limited by theme or length — into four short tracks, nonetheless capturing much of that improvisational energy. The lyrics of 'Ya Weylou', for example, are about jealousy, but this is only a fraction of the actual song: "Hassani songs can go on for hours, so for the EP I had to select only one part. When we play it live it is much longer and there are many other verses," explains Tichiti. The interplay between Tichiti's delicate *gimbri* playing and the subtle electronic embellishments, handclaps and sturdy drumming are emblematic of the modern Hassani style championed on *Jarama*.

The EP is the result of a 2018 journey Tichiti and two of his Chalaban bandmates took from Budapest to Laayooune, Dakhla and Guelmim, Tichiti's birthplace, also known as the 'Gateway to the Sahara.' The trip was documented in Rachid Kasmi's documentary *Échos du Sahara*, which vividly depicts the complexities — and magic — that arise when different musical traditions converge. One scene captures the Hungarian musicians grappling with the ever-changing, improvisational style of a local singer in Dakhla, a moment that ultimately gave rise to the enchanting 'Ya Lolayli', which highlights Tichiti's low, earthy vocals with its opening *mawwal* — the traditional and popular Arabic style of vocal improvisation.

For Tichiti the trip was a valuable opportunity to rediscover the traditional music he'd grown up with: "As a child it's hard to enjoy it, but once you understand it, you see how dynamic it is. The poems are guiding the music and the musicians have to be ready to make improvisations on the spot. There is a lot of spiritual energy in Hassani music."

He only truly fell in love with his style after meeting Mauritanian *griot* Dimi Mint Abba while studying in Rabat. Much like Abba's songs, the music on *Jarama* blends Arabic lyrics and improvisation with West African influences. With its clattering percussion and echoey electric guitar 'Fulani' celebrates Gnawa's Sub-Saharan origins, while the word 'Jarama' itself means thank you in some West African languages.

"On *Jarama* I really wanted to focus on this connection with Western African music, I feel like it's part of my culture," says Tichiti, who was born to a Berber mother and a Black African father. "In Guelmim you find all the cultures together, and it reflects in my openness to diversity. Being born there was my big chance."

MEGAN IACOBINI DE FAZIO

+ *Saïd Chalaban's* ***Jarama*** *EP is out now on Argana*

Attila Kleb

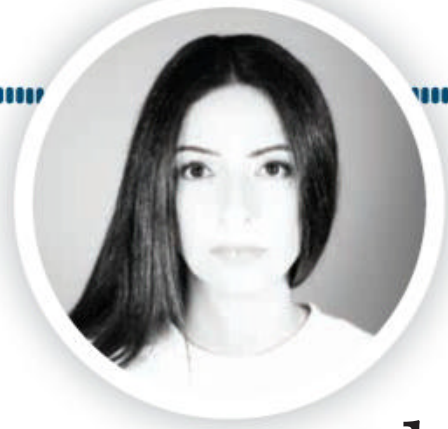
Niels Knelis

SAGAZAN STORMS THE 'SONICS

French singer-songwriter starts off the year with victory at Eurosonic

The Music Moves Europe (MME) Awards, hosted at Eurosonic Noorderslag (ESNS) in Groningen in January, shone a light on one artist in particular: Zaho de Sagazan took away both the Grand Jury and Public Choice awards, the former being presented to her by special guest of the night Jools Holland. The French singer-songwriter released her first full length studio album, *La Symphonie des Éclairs* in March 2023 and an EP, *La Bonne Étoile* (containing an excellent, retro-heavy cover of '99 Luftballons'), in December. Mixing Stromae-esque electronics with delicate, ponderous lyricism, she has met huge acclaim, the MMEs (at which Stromae also happened to claim victory during his rise) being case and point.

After wiping away a few tears, de Sagazan closed the awards with a performance, indicating just why people are taking notice of her. She sang more traditional, indie-based reflections such as 'La Symphonie des Éclairs', a melodic contemplation of her sensitivity as a child, how it left her feeling out of control of her emotions until she met the piano. But most of the performance was made up of movement-inducing numbers such as 'Ne Te Regardes Pas' (Don't Look at Yourself), an encouragement to dance without inhibition, which saw her entering the crowd, zealously encouraging them to partake. She's a spectacular artist, fully deserving of the MME recognition, who we are surely going to see and hear more of in the year to come. EMMA RYCROFT



The 4 Corners and Centre of LINA_'s Universe

Despite making her name in fado, the Portuguese singer has refreshingly varied tastes, drawn to these albums for their intimacy, power, lyricism and use of silence

Paul Buchanan
Mid Air
(Newsroom Records, 2012)

This is one of those records suggested to me by the algorithm, based on what I was listening to at the time. It was a case of love at first listen. It somehow struck me for its emotional resonance, and it has been a faithful companion due to the peaceful and calm feeling that it brings me. The silence and the space Buchanan creates within each song, as well as his lyrics about love, loss, death, all of it ended up having some influence on my own writing. He co-founded The Blue Nile, but released this solo record in 2012, some years after the band had called it quits. Later, I met Dead Can Dance's Jules Maxwell, a friend of Buchanan's, and he sparked again my interest in this beautiful and introspective album.

Nils Petter Molvær
Khmer
(ECM,1998)

Molvær is a trumpet player, composer and producer who fuses jazz and electronic music, working a lot with samples – some of them taken from his previous records. *Khmer* is a relaxed and appealing album, working its way through various ambiences and moods, and the way it brings together jazz and electronics ended up an important reference to me… it's a bit similar to [my previous album] *Lina_Raül Refree*. I love instrumental music – I'm a great fan of Ryuichi Sakamoto, for instance – and I'm stunned by the power of sound; how it can be so chilling without resorting to words… I'm fascinated by the way Molvær builds these arrangements around the trumpet – ever his centre.

THE CENTRE

Amália Rodrigues
Busto
(Columbia, 1962)

This is a record deeply connected to me and to the history of *fado*. It was a revolutionary album, because of both Alain Oulman's compositions and the literary poetry Amália was singing. I think it's Amália's most memorable record. I remember when I first heard it. Back in 1999, when Amália passed way, back home we bought a handful of her records and this was the one that impressed me the most. I didn't have a clue who Alain Oulman was then, but I fell helplessly in love with how he wrote for the piano. There was immediately a song I strongly identified with, 'Abandono', which reminds me of my grandfather, perhaps the fado that has the strongest hold on me, and the first one I ever sang live. I would say *Busto* is the record where I found my own singing style. A couple of years ago I sang it in full during a homage show. This is a record I always go back to, as it is a big part of my life.

INTERVIEW BY GONÇALO FROTA

Sufjan Stevens
Carrie & Lowell
(Asthmatic Kitty, 2015)

I absolutely love this record for its theme: Sufjan Stevens' intimacy addressing his mother's life, her marriage, her husband, the way it all sounds so personal and close when he sings about the time of her life and her death. It's a very tender album that has somehow become part of my day-to-day. I really like concept albums and this one is done in such a masterful and confidential manner; it really feels like we are being granted access to his life. At times, Stevens seems to touch all these subjects lightly, but when you zoom in on the lyrics and go deep into each song and his personal thoughts it reveals [itself] as something quite sensitive and moving.

Phoebe Bridgers
Punisher
(Dead Oceans, 2020)

This is a recent one for me. There's a song I really love, 'Garden Song', it's quite poetic, with beautiful lyrics, where Phoebe Bridgers sings [that] there must be something in the water for her to be growing up so fast. She creates these powerful mental images where we can see ourselves being part of her stories. I'm not sure if it's the production, her vocal melodies or the lyrics, but I do feel throughout the whole album like my feet are always above ground, as if I am levitating somehow. I'm always looking for new stuff and I like to follow my emotional response to music. So, regardless of genre, if a song takes my interest, like 'Garden Song' did, I go for the album and stay there for a while.

+ *LINA_*'s new album *Fado Camões* is a Top of the World this issue, p53; 'Que Ninguem Me Veja Ver-Vos' is on this issue's Top of the World compilation, track 6

SONGLINES ENCOUNTERS FESTIVAL 16 – 19 MAY 2024 KINGS PLACE

Soema Montenegro

Songlines Encounters Festival 2024
16-19 May 2024, Kings Place, London

This is *Songlines*' 25th anniversary year and the *Songlines Encounters Festival* at Kings Place has become a treasured annual event offering a special chance to hear some of the artists we've been championing at close quarters. We have a strong range of female vocalists this year, with Asmâa Hamzaoui, Soema Montenegro, Enji and the Regia Ishag-fronted The Scorpios, and more names still to be announced.

www.kingsplace.co.uk/sef

THURSDAY MAY 16

Asmâa Hamzaoui & Bnat Timbouktou (Hall One)

The daughter of a respected Gnawa *maalem* (master), Asmâa is the most prominent of very few female Gnawa musicians in Morocco singing and playing the deep *gimbri* lute. She comes with her female backing group Bnat Timbouktou (Daughters of Timbuktu) who've done headline shows at Essaouira's legendary Gnawa Festival. Be prepared for trance-like sensations.

Asmâa Hamzaoui

FRIDAY MAY 17

Soema Montenegro (Hall Two) UK Premiere

Argentinian 'shaman-poet' Montenegro is a magical realist blending Indigenous and urban sounds in her music. Her recent album *Círculo Radiante* (Radiant Circle) is a musical journey through northern Argentina with guitar, Venezuelan *cuatro* and snare drum.

The Scorpios

SATURDAY MAY 18

The Scorpios (Hall Two)

The mostly Sudanese members of this ten-strong band are now in London and, with the wonderfully raw vocals of Regia Ishag and others, they present a heady mix of shuffling guitar, stabbing horns and swirling synth. Expect a steamy night of razor-sharp and rootsy east African music.

SUNDAY MAY 19

Enji (Hall Two)

From Ulaan Bator, Enji is a rising star of Mongolian music, performing here in a trio with guitar and double bass. '*The Mongolian language is a wonderful vehicle for vocal jazz*,' said our *Songlines* Top of the World review of her last album *Ulaan*, '*with its distinctive trills and invitation to subtly scoop from one pitch to another in a manner suggestive of the spaces between standardised tones*.' Her music promises something personal, visionary and different.

+ More events to be announced soon

Enji

The curation of Songlines Encounters is supported by the 1900 Building (1900bldg.com)

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TAKE NOTE

LAIR

Meet the Indonesian ritualists conjuring intense connections to their cultural heritage, everyday existence and the earthly loam itself. "We're looking for another form from clay," they tell ***Daniel Spicer***

It's rare to find a band as intimately connected to a sense of place as Indonesian sextet, LAIR. Hailing from Jatiwanga in the Pantura region on the northern coast of West Java, their identity is deeply enmeshed in local culture, history and even the earth itself. In recognition of Jatiwanga's former role as South-East Asia's biggest producer of clay roof tiles, LAIR fashion their own instruments from terracotta. "We're looking for another form from clay," says percussionist Kiki Permana, "becoming culture, becoming other forms beyond roof tiles. We make guitars, ceramic xylophones or clay ukulele. The way of playing is the same. The sound has its own different character."

LAIR's connection to local tradition goes even deeper. The group formed in 2018 after witnessing a performance by guitarist Mama Djana, a maestro of classical Indonesian *tarling* music. "Tarling is one of the original traditions in Pantura," says LAIR's lead guitarist and vocalist, Tedi Nurmanto. "[It's] music that is really attached to our ears daily. That's why we explore it in our music." Central to this is the idea of tarling as the living vernacular of ordinary folks. "Not just from its music, but from the simplicity of the lyrics," says Permana. "It's like narrating about life that's right in front of our eyes. Daily phenomena."

With its raw guitar licks and galloping hand percussion, LAIR's music certainly sounds like an urgent, electrified update on the more sedate traditional acoustic tarling. It's notably free of familiar rock cliché, with a rough intensity similar to the guitar-driven desert blues of Saharan Touareg groups. "We don't have references from the global north," Permana clarifies. "All [our influences are] from the south, like Thailand's Khun Narin's Electric Phin Band, and Tinariwen from Africa. Nothing from the West, actually. The bands we mentioned, they're also very organic from their regions, remote areas where they suddenly formed. They're the same [as us]."

Any suggestion that LAIR's music sits within some loose definition of global psychedelia is brushed aside: "We didn't realise that LAIR can be psychedelic," says Tedi. "Actually, the psychedelic side comes from the tradition of *obrog-obrog,*" he explains, referring to the crudely amplified, percussion-heavy mobile sound systems that roam neighbourhoods during Ramadan waking up families so they can share the *sahur* meal before the sun comes up. "We imitate those," Permana confirms. "We derive our style from those performances and the horn speaker sound."

In fact, the idea of travel and mobility is central to LAIR's new album, *Ngélar*, the follow-up to 2019 debut *Kiser Kenamaan*. Percussionist Tamtam (Tamyiz Noor Ramadhan) explains that "the contents of this album are about the journey during the last tour." The album's title refers to the tradition of a wandering musical performance, in which musicians would travel from place to place offering celebration in every community they encounter. Sure enough, the album paints vivid pictures of local life. "The album is not very far from our lives in Jatiwangi," says guest vocalist, Monica Hapsari. 'Pesta Rakyat Pabrik Gula' is about a local sugar factory which organises a week-long festival during the sugarcane harvest. "Before the time of the tile factory packaging," explains Permana, "it was the era of the colonial sugar factories of the Netherlands, so it's talking about that time in our area." The haunting 'Kawin Tebu' conjures the custom of calling the gods and goddesses to descend and bless the sugarcane harvest ritual – with Monica Hapsari's otherworldly vocal ululations mimicking traditional West Javan *beluk* singing. It's clear the group find their home an inexhaustible source of inspiration. "Pantura is actually a way of life," says Tedi. "That's what we see." ◆

+ Ngélar *is reviewed on p58. 'Setan Dolbon (feat Monica Hapsari)' is featured on this issue's compilation, track 14.*

Meuri

Voices from the East

Voices from the East is a remarkable day of orchestral music conducted by Kirill Karabits with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra. The Ukrainian conductor has been the orchestra's chief conductor for 15 years and he describes these *Voices of the East* pieces as their "identity card."

In an unprecedented event Karabits brings highlights of this repertoire to the Southbank Centre for three concerts on a single day. And what's interesting for *Songlines* readers is that most of these pieces draw extensively on folk and national traditions from the countries concerned – including Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Ukraine.

"These national traditions are essential to this music," says Karabits. "We're talking about a symphonic tradition which was part of the Soviet Union and the person who showed an example was Khachaturian, the father of that 'eastern tradition.' He took the national music tradition of Armenia, combined it with the modern symphonic tradition and created a style which was unique and rich in Armenian folk music. And that was an example for many other composers later, like Garayev, who did the same with Azerbaijani music, or Chary Nurymov from Turkmenistan. They basically used the western symphonic tradition through Mahler and Shostakovich and created something unique, each of them in a different way, using their own cultural identity and music."

The first of these composers Karabits recorded was Gara Garayev (1918-1982), who was a specialist in Azeri folk music as well as a prolific composer. He studied with Shostakovich and in the late 1940s and 50s wrote a number of colourful ballets and orchestral pieces which can indeed be seen as the Azerbaijani equivalent of Khachaturian's popular scores for *Gayane* and *Spartacus*. "East and West co-existed in me," said Garayev and a ballet like *Seven Beauties*, based on a poem by Nizami, is full of local colour.

One of the most striking of the pieces in *Voices from the East* is the *3rd Symphony* by

"MUSIC OF GREAT FINESSE AND VIVID COLOUR"

The Guardian on the Garayev recording

Blue Giant Orkestar

Karabits with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra

Armenian composer Avet Terterian (1929-1994), which has a central movement played by traditional instruments, the reedy *zurna* and *duduk*. The soft, plangent sound of the duduk is the most evocative in Armenian music and the slow movement has a drone duduk playing continuously with circular breathing for nearly nine minutes!

"It's the most fragile and the most violent piece of music I've ever seen and heard in my life," admits Karabits. "It has the softest ever moments and the loudest and most brutal. There's certainly a reference to the [Armenian] genocide but there is no story and I don't think he intended one."

Karabits was brought up in a musical family in Kyiv. His father, Ivan Karabyts, was a composer who also founded the Kyiv Music Fest, an annual festival of contemporary music. That's where Kirill Karabits first heard a lot of the music featured in *Voices from the East*.

The Terterian Symphony (of 1975) is performed alongside *Styx* by the Georgian composer Giya Kancheli (1935-2019), a friend of Terterian. It's a deeply spiritual piece for solo viola, choir and orchestra, like the mythological Styx river, inhabiting a transitory world between life and death.

"Kancheli is thinking about friends and colleagues who have passed away and their names are sung by the choir – including Alfred Schnittke and Avets [Terterian]. It's symbolic and very, very Georgian. His music is very theatrical."

One of the Ukrainian composers Karabits has been performing is Boris Lyatoshynsky (1895-1968), who was one of his father's teachers. Karabits recorded Lyatoshynksy's *3rd Symphony* with the BSO and is doing the *4th* in *Voices of the East*. "I call him the key composer of Ukraine because he has a very strong identity," the conductor explains. "There is a strong element of folk music there plus 19th-century and early Soviet traditions, but not only Russian music. He combined different European traditions and created something unique."

"KARABITS AND HIS BOURNEMOUTH PLAYERS REALLY BRING OUT THE DETAIL OF LYATOSHYNSKY'S IMAGINATIVE ORCHESTRATION"
Gramophone

But *Voices of the East* isn't just about re-discovering forgotten masterpieces from the region, it's also about new voices, so the day includes BSO commissions from Franghiz Ali-Zadeh and Anna Korsun, contemporary female composers from Azerbaijan and Ukraine respectively.

Since the Russian invasion of February 2022, there's certainly been a growth of interest in music and artists from Ukraine. It's something that Karabits has noticed, but certainly doesn't want to exploit. "I would say there is now more room for Ukrainian music. But when you do Ukrainian music in that context, it's very easy to fall into a sort of political self-promotion. People take Ukrainian music because there was an invasion. But what I'm always trying to do, and what we've always done with the BSO long before the invasion, is to show that Ukraine is a lot more than that. Ukraine has its own music tradition." ◆

You can see the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra and conductor Kirill Karabits bring to life orchestral masterpieces in a day-long celebration of music from Ukraine and beyond at The Southbank Centre on Sunday, 19 May.
Tickets are available from £15 at: https://www.southbankcentre.co.uk/whats-on/festivals-series/classical-season/voices-east

Words by Simon Broughton; Photos by John Millar and Mark Allan

SPOTLIGHT

Katherine Priddy

The singer-songwriter tells ***Tim Cumming*** about the power of poetry, the play of time and where she's taking her music following her acclaimed debut

For an artist about to release her second, keenly-anticipated album, Katherine Priddy has covered a lot of road. We're meeting on a quiet afternoon at The Queens pub in Crouch End, that late Victorian palace admired by Pevsner, and itself a folk venue back in the 1970s. It's early December, and Katherine Priddy is mid-tour, supporting The Unthanks' Christmas show, before breaking off for three dates at Dublin's Vicar Street with Damien Dempsey. Scattered throughout these end-of-year solo sets are songs from *The Pendulum Swing*, the follow-up to her name-making debut.

Recorded in her home city of Birmingham with guest turns from John Smith, George Boomsma, The Staves' Marcus Hamblett and string arrangements by Harry Fausing Smith, it's a more intimate and emotive set than 2021's *The Eternal Rocks Beneath*. That was an album scored by myth and lore, whether the dark, lupine allure of 'Wolf', the folk horror of 'Ring O'Roses', the metamorphoses of 'Eurydice' and 'Icarus', or the strongly metaphorical 'The Spring Never Came'.

Songwriting great Richard Thompson, who has been a Priddy fan since 2018's *Wolf* EP, invited her on tour with him in Ireland in 2019, declaring her the "best thing I've heard all year." She joined him, too, for a UK tour in 2021. "It was amazing to hear him play each night," she recalls. "He's such a raconteur on the stage. Very funny. And very quiet backstage. Such a strong character." She went on tour with Loudon Wainwright III too, another veteran with a rich and strange and varied songbook. "He's another great stage raconteur." A pause. "He's less quiet backstage."

For Priddy, the road from one stage to another stretches way into 2024, with a string of UK dates in the spring, a return to Australia on the cards, plans to take her new album to

Europe, and a return to the US, after playing Folk Alliance in Kansas City in 2022. "Which was bonkers. All these musicians from around the world crammed into hotel rooms. It was completely surreal."

A poetry lover and voracious reader more or less since she learnt to read – she went on to study English Literature at Sussex University – Priddy describes her new songs as very much lyric-led creations. "The words come first," she says of her method, "then I'll fart around on my guitar and find a melody that I'll match to the initial lyric idea, and it goes from there."

The ease with which she seems to be able to match and marry rich and sophisticated lyrics to memorable melodies marks out her singular talent, one that raises new songs like 'Ready to Go' to instant classic status.

This beautifully unapologetic leave-taking song, a duet between Priddy and co-writer George Boomsma, a singer from North Yorkshire, sounds like the kind of Americana classic that could have flowed from Willie Nelson's pen. Spotify superstar John Smith plays guitar on the track, adding to its textures. Priddy toured with Smith in 2022, and his slide guitar features elsewhere on the set. "He's on 'These Words of Mine', and 'Father of Two'," says Priddy, "and plays some lovely slide guitar, which gives it a little more of an Americana feel. He's such a great guitarist," she adds, "I really wanted to have him to work his magic on there."

Like 'Ready to Go', 'Anyway, Always' and 'Does She Hold You Like I Did' are songs of departure, loss, fare-thee-wells that stay close once you've heard them. "'Anyway, Always' is about trying to maintain those relationships while being a touring musician and while being someone who isn't very good at settling down," she says, "and not very good at knowing what they want."

While 'Does She Hold You' dates back to her debut set, its Ennio Morricone-style brass and strings are new. "It has got that galloping pace to it, and I like that idea of treating love as some kind of western frontier. Love as a battlefield vibe."

Elsewhere, there are songs focusing on childhood, home, memory, on returning and leaving – the pendulum swing of the title. "It's not a full concept album, but there is definitely the theme of home running through it," she says. "Over the past few years when I've been writing these songs, I've been doing a lot of toing and froing, moving out of my childhood home, coming back, working out what I want to do next, and a lot of songs have been born out of that. It's not a concept, more of a focus," she adds, pointing to songs about her twin brother ('Walnut Shell') and her dad ('Father of Two').

'First House on the Left' sees her childhood home in a village just south of Birmingham set within a jewel of a song that encompasses memory and personal meaning as anchors dropped into the epic flows of time, and is typically compact and impactful as a lyric. "I've always read a lot. A voracious reader. I loved poetry, and I also listened to a lot of folky songwriters, like Nick Drake and John Renbourn, John Martyn, all those. Even Frank Zappa" – she cites his epic *Joe's Garage* as an unlikely inspiration – "Words have always been really important. Before I started songwriting, I always wrote poems and stories, so once I started playing guitar, it was quite natural to start putting those poems to music. I like poetry because of its concision and compactness. With poetry, every word has weight, and I try to treat songs like that as well, so there is not too much extraneous language in there. Even though my songs are very wordy, I try and make sure that it all has weight."

"I try to treat songs like [poetry], so there is not too much extraneous language in there... I try and make sure that it all has weight"

The Pendulum Swing is bookended by short instrumental pieces, sound collages that carry over into the songs. "I wanted to do an intro and an outro that tied the whole album together," she says, "and I sprinkled sounds of home and home recordings throughout the album, to make that home theme more personal and lived in." There's even a snatch of her three-year-old self chatting to her father introducing 'Father of Two'. "I wanted to make the whole thing feel personal and intimate," she says. It's the sharpness of her lyrical and melodic gifts that ensures that intimacy, rather than sentimentality, comes to the fore.

For such a lyrically gifted artist with a knack for locating the right melody to carry her words, she was a late developer as a singer. "I thought I was terrible for a really long time," she laughs. "I still do get imposter syndrome, even now."

Touring with The Unthanks has given her pause to reflect on the gender politics at play across folk music's stages in the 2020s. "It's nice to tour with other women, which is not something I've done much of," she says. "I sometimes think women are kept separate on sets, because we're seen as being similar, even though you'll get back-to-back men with guitars. It does sometimes feel like you're the token, but it is improving. It's better than it was," she adds, but like the road that stretches ahead of her as a writer and a singer who has already come into her own, "there's still a way to go." And ready to go she is. ◆

+ ***The Pendulum Swing*** *is reviewed this issue, see p54. 'First House on the Left' is on this issue's compilation, track 15*

Damien Hyde; Matteo D'Ambrosio

SIMON SAYS…

Simon Broughton discovers the songs and stories of the Ainu people newly and beautifully exhibited at London's Japan House

We've featured the music of OKI several times in these pages (most recently in a live review from Lewes in #192) as a leading musical ambassador of the Indigenous Ainu people in Japan. With his plucked *tonkori* and yodel-like vocals, he sings of his people's threatened existence while celebrating their culture. *Ainu Stories: Contemporary Lives by the Saru River*, an exhibition at Japan House in London does the same. Alongside exquisite bark-cloth robes and carved wooden plates, there have been singing and storytelling sessions.

The Ainu people live mainly in Hokkaido, Japan's most northerly island. During the 19th and 20th centuries they were forbidden to speak their language and suffered discrimination and marginalisation. It was only in 1997 that Ainu culture and traditions were recognised in Japanese law. This exhibition is the first survey in the UK of the contemporary culture of the Ainu. The exhibition focuses on the village of Nibutani, a community of around 400 people on the Saru river. An estimated 70 or 80% are Ainu making it one of the densest areas of Indigenous population. It does feel like a culture on the verge of extinction.

In an evening of stories and songs, three Ainu residents of Nibutani, dressed in robes with elegant designs, performed the three types of oral literature. These are *uepekar* (which are like spoken fairy tales), *kamuy yukar* (which are songs sung by the kamuy, the spirits that inhabit animals, trees and objects) and *yukar* (long entertainment songs that can have superhero characters.

Harada Rino (left) performing a *yukar* next to Toyota Reiko

In the first two, there were characters who showed little respect for the creatures they encountered and these were the ones that ultimately suffered. There was clearly an underlying moral that you need to respect nature. The kamuy yukar, about an owl spirit, was beautiful with a wide-ranging lively melody and a repeated refrain sung by Toyota Reiko. The final yukar was in a very different style with a more stuttering delivery and a narrower melodic range. As Harada Rino sung it, she tapped the table in a 4/4 rhythm with a narrow stick.

In the songs there were times when just the Ainu text but no translation was put up because the meaning of the words has been lost. As there's now no one who has Ainu as a first language or uses it in daily life, these songs have been learned from archive recordings. Harada Rino mentioned some of them had been learned from grandparents. "It's been hard in the past to be proud of being Ainu," she said, but now that's changing.

In the exhibition it's the robes that are the most visually striking – the bark-cloth *attus* with indigo-dyed cotton designs and the cotton *kaparamip* with swirling designs. These even look like they could be illustrating music; and OKI has used one of these designs as an album cover.

The fragility of Ainu is a lesson to us all to safeguard the Indigenous traditions we have on this planet. Each of them has its unique beauties. And I admire those working so hard to encourage and revive this culture. There's one word in the Ainu language I'll certainly remember: *aynu* means 'human being'. ◆

+ *Ainu Stories: Contemporary Lives by the Saru River* *is on at Japan House, London until April 21. Visit japanhouselondon.uk for more information*

An *attus* Ainu robe

Cody Bamford; Simon Broughton

Next Issue…

May 2024 (#197)
On sale April 5

We're speaking to **Emel Mathlouthi,** a singer who became an emblem of the Tunisian Revolution before having to leave the country, and who's set to release a 100% woman-made album; and we will remain in the **Middle East** for a deep dive into music scenes in cities such as Cairo, Beirut and Tunis. We will also speak to Somalia's **Sahra Halgan** about her new album, have a chat with **Dele Sosimi** about his time in the bands of Fela and Femi Kuti, and talk to **Mexican Institute of Sound** about 20 years of putting Mexico on the map. Plus, Pakistan's **Sabri Brothers**, US' **Lonnie Holley**, Greece's **Marina Satti** and exiled Syrian **Mohammad Syfkhan**, as well as revealing the winners of the ***Songlines Music Awards 2024***.

Emel Mathlouthi

Amber Grey

FEEDBACK

Letters, shout-outs, comments, emails and everything in between

Get in touch – we'd love to hear from you!

Write to:
Email: letters@songlines.co.uk
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The Joy of *Songlines*

I just thought I would email and let you know that I absolutely love *Songlines*! Artists and albums and gigs and songs and viewpoints I would not otherwise encounter. I read through and listen all through the month, and then repeat afresh each month. And then a little bit of back tracking. Magical. Thank you to you and your lovely team.
Chris Maddocks, Shropshire

Canadian Kudos

Kudos to the person or persons who put together this 25-year CD.

Wonderful choices, great variety in voices, instruments & tempos.

Terrific overall ambiance and flair from beginning to end. Bravo.
Dominique Soutif, Ottawa, Canada

The CD Debate

As a purchaser of around six music magazines a month – two who have covermount CDs (it was three with *Songlines*) I prefer to purchase music magazines from retail outlets. I have enjoyed the *Songlines* covermounts especially for their wide range of music – ideal for the car and listening to when reading the magazine and other nefarious activities. So it is a pity the CDs are only going to be available to subscribers.

I suspect this is as much as a commercial and financial decision as well as the publishers not wishing to clog up the plant with non-degradable CDs going into landfill.

But hold on! Having read the news in *Songlines*' e-newsletter, I was preparing to go without my monthly dose of new global music; [now] I find that the disc on the 25th anniversary edition was available on download. It was downloaded in double quick time and sits in my Music library – and good it is too! I have other downloads from magazines who did this instead of CDs in the past, including the great alt country label out of Chicago: Bloodshot Records. I do hope that *Songlines* will make the edition's CDs [available] to those of us who also '*really want them*,' but are happy with downloads. No pesky landfill problems, they play on the Mac or PC, in the car or on your phone – so is that the plan?

I for one hope so. It ain't difficult; or is it [really] a commercial decision to phase out the bonus of some great music to listen to? Good 25th anniversary edition too!
Tony Burke, Bedford

A response from our editor:
Hey Tony, thanks for the message; And thanks to all the others who left comments about the removal of the covermount CD from retail copies of the magazine. It was a tough decision and one we believe we made for all the right reasons. But we are always listening and trying to do what we can to make Songlines better, so I'm sure you'll be happy to know that we will be making the compilation available as a download for anyone who buys the magazine – see p7 for the link. If there's anything else we can do to improve, let us know.

READER PROFILE

TIM EDENSOR, LONDON

WHEN DID YOU FIRST DISCOVER SONGLINES?
2004

WHAT'S ON YOUR STEREO?
Bill Frisell, Culture, Keith Jarrett, Agnes Obel, Orchestra Baobab, Matthew Halsall, Tinariwen, Aphex Twin, Ustad Saami

FAVOURITE ALBUMS?
Marvin Gaye, *What's Going On*; Dick Gaughan, *Handful of Earth*; King Sunny Adé, *Juju Music*; Lee Perry, *Arkology*; Iron & Wine, *Our Endless Numbered Days*; Anouar Brahem, *Blue Maqams*.

FAVOURITE NEW ARTIST?
Hermanos Gutiérrez, Angeline Morrison, Fergus McCreadie

FAVOURITE GIGS?
Bob Marley & the Wailers, Finsbury Park, London, 1977. Peerless. The first WOMAD in 1982. It was a revelation! Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, WOMAD, Morecambe, 1991. Staggering. Radiohead at the Manchester Evening News Arena, 2012. Awesome.

WORST LIVE EXPERIENCE?
The Maly Opera Theatre of Leningrad [in] Edinburgh. It was harrowing to stand in the wings as a stagehand for the six nights of the performance: alternating high pitched and deep baritone singing!

If you would like to be our next Reader Profile, please email us your answers and a picture to letters@songlines.co.uk

AT SHORT NOTICE

Great to see Tamsin Elliott & Tarek Elazhary (Alan James Creative Bursary 2022) in the Best Group category for @SonglinesMag *Music Awards* 2024
From: @TheEFDSS

In @SonglinesMag... @elizacarthy about her friend & fellow musician in the band@ImaginedVillage & also a member of@ACSSofficial, Simon Emmerson who died last year of cancer. A very important man in terms of... seeing British trad music as 'World Music'.
From: @Gach_Treo (Translated from Irish)

[In response to our live review of Béla Fleck in Dublin]: A great night. It was amazing seeing so many virtuoso musicians playing together as a band and having so much fun doing it.
From: Andrew Needham on Facebook

WIN

Thirty Tigers bundle of 25(!) vinyls and CDs **09** ◆ Bundle containing Divanhana, Baklava, Alice in Wonderband and 2CD compilation from **CPL-Music** **12** ◆ Ten copies of **Warsaw Village Band**'s *Sun Celebration* on vinyl/CD **32**

COMPETITIONS Submit your entry for each competition via the website: **songlines.co.uk/competitions**. Winners will be chosen at random. Only one entry per household. No cash alternatives. If you would prefer not to be sent details of other *Songlines* products and services, or products from other carefully selected companies, please tick the relevant box on the entry form. Closing date for this issue's competitions (unless otherwise stated): April 19 2024

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Bringing Balestrieri back to life

Many of us would be overjoyed at the opportunity to play or even own a violin made by one of Mantua's most enigmatic makers, Tommaso Balestrieri. However, finding one in good condition **after more than 240 years** can prove challenging to say the least.

One owner was fortunate enough to find themselves in possession of a later period violin by Tomasso Balestrieri, Mantua, c.1780. With several cracks and a questionable varnish finish, the violin was far from its true potential, a huge disservice to a piece of musical history.

Fortunately the violin was brought to IJmkje van der Werf, a maker and restorer with more than 15 years' experience working with some of the finest makers and restorers, currently working in the workshop of the Royal Academy of Music, amongst other places. But one question still remained...

Why risk restoring an instrument, especially such a significant one?

Making the decision to restore an instrument is not a simple one. It can be an investment in your instrument's health and value, and it can save you money. A professional restoration can lower your insurance premium as well as reducing the risk of damage or loss that may lead to further insurance claims. In addition, if an insurance claim is made, it prevents any question over whether the instrument was properly maintained.

The violin's owner explained:

"It was clear that the instrument had been neglected for a long period of time and I wanted to make sure that it was properly cared for going forward. I'm not always in favour of extensive restorations and do believe that some instruments are better left conserved rather than restored. However, after much consideration and discussion with peers, restoration seemed to be an acceptable choice for this instrument. I felt this violin still had a lot more to offer in its lifetime and that it could really benefit a musician in the future if it was restored properly."

The owner approached Lark Music to see whether they could offer the insurance protection and peace of mind they already provide for his other instruments. After contacting Fay Watts, Manager at Lark Music for more than 15 years, they discussed the options and found the right insurance policy, with the instrument covered whilst under restoration.

Taking on the restoration

As a restorer, working on a piece of musical history can be daunting, even with years of experience. We spoke to IJmkje to better understand the perspective of a restorer....

When the owner approached you to undertake this restoration, what were your first thoughts?

I thought, 'This is going to be a lot of work and it's also pretty complicated. Will it be possible, can I do it and will it be worth it?'

This instrument is more than 200 years old, so how did you approach the restoration? Did you need to brush up your research into Balestrieri?

Yes, I didn't know that much about Balestrieri, so I looked in books, in my collection of Strad Magazine articles and articles online, and I went to see some other known examples of Balestrieri's work in the flesh. I knew the owner is a musical instrument enthusiast and that he likes finding out everything he can about instruments, so I questioned him too.

Also, because this restoration is quite complex, I went to see several colleagues to talk over all the options and approaches of this violin.

What have been some of the challenges with this particular instrument?

This instrument has lots of cracks in the front, which looks bad but that is not the main issue. They will take time to repair but they are not that complicated. However, there is one very long crack (and a few small ones) in the back. This long crack is complicated, because the arching is distorted, and because it is a slab-cut maple back. That makes it more of a challenge to get the two of the crack back together neatly.

The other big challenge with this instrument is that the whole violin has been over varnished and there is some but not a consistent amount of original varnish left underneath. That means you have to think very carefully about whether and how much of that over-varnish to clean off, and how to retouch it.

In your time as a maker and restorer, what new techniques have made a difference to this project? What would you have done differently 20 years ago?

I think say 20 years ago we were already in quite a good place in terms of thinking about not intervening more than necessary in an instrument. That would have been different say 40 or 50 years ago. However, in the last few years the 'less is more' approach has come to the fore even more it seems. Some of the cracks in the front for example look quite bad, because they are very dirty and black. Some time ago you would have opened a crack like that, cleaned it and reglued it. Now, if it is structurally sound, you can try and clean it on the surface, without opening it, so that it will look better but it doesn't need opening and completely reglueing. Because with every intervention you lose something original, however careful you are.

Also, we have some new materials for cleaning, new fillers and retouching methods and new techniques for example arching correction.

Has this project given you new appreciation for Tommaso Balestrieri's work? Will you take anything you've seen or learnt into your own work?

It has. I would be quite interested in making a violin after his model myself. So far I have mainly made Stradivari models, and this has quite a different outline and arching. The general opinion is that Balestrieris sound very good. This particular one was not in a very playable condition before, and it will be some time before it is. But I am very curious.

What have been some of your favourite aspects of working with this instrument?

Discovering and getting to know more about the work of this maker and this instrument, and piecing together what has happened to this violin in previous repairs and what is original.

If you had a time machine, is there anything you would say to Balestrieri after working on this project?

I would ask him what his thoughts are about the arching and outline, how he changed them over time in his different periods of making instruments, and also how he came to be one of the few violin makers in Mantua at the time.

As a maker, what made you pick up restoration?

I have always done restoration work since I left school. I'm fascinated by getting things together and making things work again. Though I also like the freedom of making new things.

With the Balestrieri violin still undergoing restoration, we avidly await the completion of this project. It has revealed some interesting details of the instrument's past and is a prime example of how to care for such an historically significant instrument.

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For the love of music.

The SORCER

Six years on from *137 Avenue Kaniama*, **Baloji** has returned with a cinematic debut that caused a stir at Cannes, backed by four disparately characterful albums. ***Jane Cornwell*** finds out about a new project that unites fashion, fables, fantasy, and finding a space to create

"I challenged myself," says Baloji, the Congolese-Belgian multi-hyphenate – rapper, actor, stylist, photographer, sampler, poet and filmmaker – known for giving boundaries a push. "I thought it would be interesting to write an album from the point of view of each of the movie's four main characters."

"To make a soundtrack that isn't actually in the film, but that accompanies it," he continues, referencing *Omen* (Augure), a magical realist directorial debut which premiered at last year's Cannes Film Festival and won the New Vision Award. Subsequently chosen to represent Belgium (and by extension, Congo) at the Oscars, it's a work about displacement, belonging and attitudes to sorcery, set in the DRC and told in four loosely linked chapters driven by separate individuals.

Omen boasts the arresting visual language that Baloji deployed in short films such as 2019's *Zombies* and his videos for singles including 2018's 'Peau de Chagrin – Bleu de Nuit' (a title that alludes to magic skin, a novel by Honoré de Balzac, and a French term to describe a lovebite, literally a night-bruise). Variously influenced by filmmakers such as Pedro Almodovar and Michel Gondry, as well as the Belgian surrealist artist René Magritte, Baloji's colour palette is vivid: neon yellow smoke. Lurid green foliage. Dazzling azure feathers.

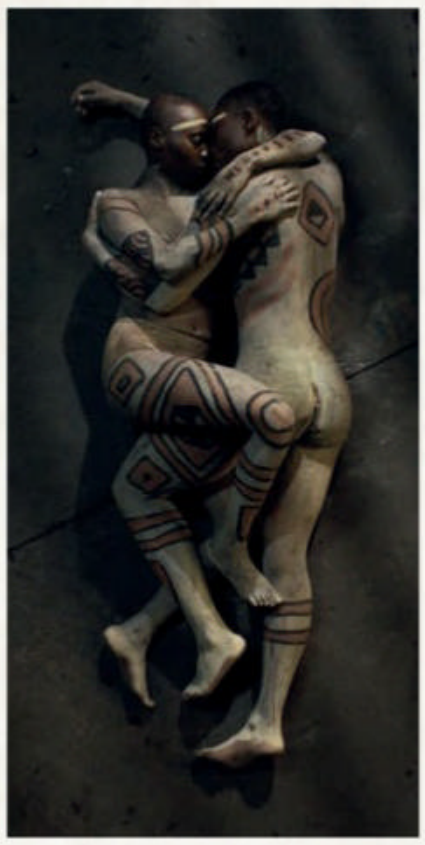
> "There was a culture clash… Me and Congo had a tough time until I gave up trying to fit in"

Baloji also co-designed (with Elke Hoste) the costumes for *Omen*, blending elements from different cultures; an accompanying exhibition, *Baloji Augurism*, runs until mid-June at MoMu, Antwerp's fashion museum. "I have been very busy," says the Ghent-based creative, anticipating questions on why he hasn't released a studio album since 2018's *137 Avenue Kaniama*. "We are building toward the international release of the film and the four albums, which has collaborations with different artists like [American soul-jazz singer] José James, [UK-based drummer] Yussef Dayes and [Cape Verdean *chanteuse*] Mayra Andrade. It took me two years to make the film and the music a reality."

In November he and Andrade performed 'Matrone', an eerie, urgent track with French and Cape Verdean Creole lyrics, on the *COLORS* music channel, Baloji kitted out in a green dress and turban, a string of pearls around his neck, diamantés in his ears. Baloji's penchant for mashing genres extends to his own outfits: the four forthcoming albums' covers will feature him in scenes and ensembles representing each main character's essence.

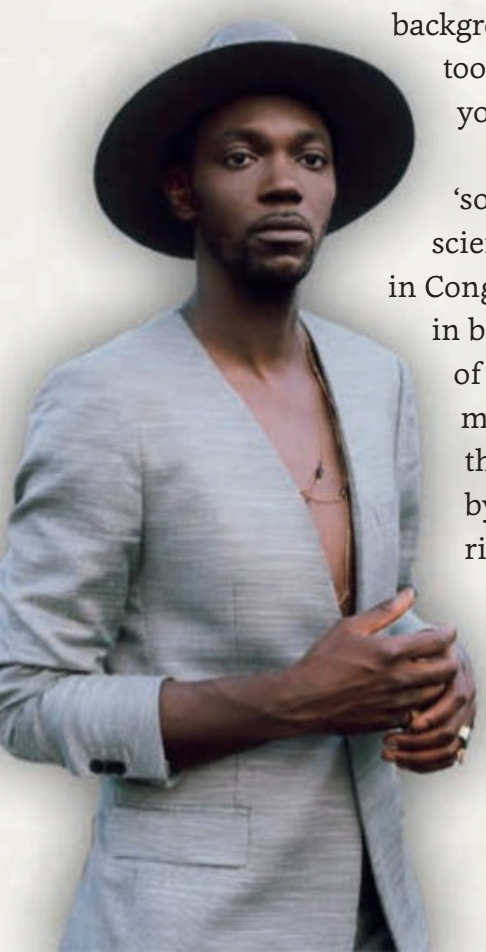
There is the album for Koffi (played by Marc Zinga), a Congolese man living in France with his white fiancée, Alice (Lucie Debay), who is pregnant. When the two visit Koffi's family, who've damned him as a 'sorcerer' due to a facial birthmark, the trip goes south after his nosebleed drips onto his sister's baby, causing chaos. "Koffi has the most European sound, with the most soul, jazz and hip-hop influence," says Baloji, whose five-track taster of the forthcoming albums includes a tune for Koffi, 'La Tâche', a dark synthscape inhabited by Baloji's furious bars and the voice of South African soul singer Bongeziwe Mabandla.

There is the character Paco (Marcel Otete Kabeya), a street kid gang leader whose magic tricks – bodies sawn in half, acrobat-infused wrestling matches – find him subverting and exploiting his label as a sorcerer. His tune, 'Arcade', is a fast-paced track ▸



lent grit by Nigerian Afrobeats artist Swazzi. Tschala (Eliane Umuhire), Koffi's hip and vivacious sister, is intent on decamping to Nigeria or South Africa with her polyamorous, STD-passing boyfriend ("Europe's been over since 2008," she quips). Her album, says Baloji, is a paean to womanhood and female sexuality ('*We can be resilient / without having the values of men*' run the lyrics on 'Matrone'); 'Autopsy', also for Tschala, is inspired by the "freedom-fighting spirit" of Congolese singer Tshala Muana. "Muana [1958-2022] was one of the most important female Congolese singers ever," says Baloji. "She advocated for female freedom, emancipation and true sexuality in relation to men [in Congo]."

Then there is Koffi's mother Mujila (Yves-Marina Gnahoua), stiff-backed and suspicious of Kofi, Alice and Tschala until she is widowed and cast aside. She gets the reflective 'Gorgone (Too Old)' with its arpeggiated guitar and Chicago diva Jamila Woods' vocal blessings: "The mom's music is more reflective of time passing and what she is ultimately confronted with," says Baloji. He continues, "The albums became tools for the rest of the team, the designers and cinematographer [Joaquim Phillipe] as well as the actors." Baloji worked with Belgian auteur Liesa Van der Aa on the largely ambient background music within the film itself. "We took out most of the vocals… they took you away from the narration."



While Baloji's name translates to 'sorcerer' in Swahili ("It meant 'man of science' until the onset of Christianity in Congo"), and although filming was done in both Kinshasa and the mining town of Lubumbashi, his birthplace, 3,000 miles apart ("Congo tries to separate these two cities and their ethnicities by having no direct roads or train-rides; I wanted to join the country using a fake location") he insists the movie is not autobiographical. '*I don't write as Baloji*,' he has said. '*I write as Baloji under the skin of the characters*.'

"The image is an extension of the music and the words… It all goes together"

Fast-moving, with lurching camera angles and intriguing non-linear visuals – there's a Mardi Gras marching band, kid gang members dressed in tiaras and pink dresses and a random countertenor (Baloji's cousin, Serge Kakudji) breaking into golden song – the 90-minute film also speaks to Baloji's work as a commercials director. While he has said that this, his most lucrative side-hustle, is invariably looked down on by purist filmmakers (Baloji never formally studied film), it nonetheless equipped him to shoot *Omen* over a strict 23-day schedule. "I know how to be extremely efficient," says Baloji.

Everything he does is linked by invisible silver threads. "For me the image is an extension of the music and the words; I love to write poetry. Hip-hop is an extension of poetry. It all goes together. I used to have a one-dimensional idea of music from Congo until I went there," says Baloji, who has collaborated with the likes of *likembe*-twanging sensations Konono No 1, and whose band, L'Orchestre de la Katuba, includes veteran guitarist Dizzy Mandjeku (former bandleader of Orchestre OK

Left and right: Stills from *Omen*

Jazz after Franco's passing), seen at festivals including WOMAD playing from a chair.

"There are lots of styles, but many of them are ignored or underdeveloped because unlike, say, South Africa, there is no real music industry." Born Serge Baloji Tshiani, he was three years old when his late businessman father stole him away from his mother, a local from Lubumbashi, and disappeared to Ostend on the Belgian coast because Marvin Gaye had written his 1981 smash hit 'Sexual Healing' there ("My dad loved Marvin Gaye, followed by Julio Iglesias"), later leaving him with his stepfamily in Liège.

Until his early 20s he was all about tagging and graffiti, hip-hop and industrial electro. He started rapping at a youth centre between running with a gang; at that same time he wrote verse, winning a poetry competition in France ("A poem about being young and bored"). Aged 15, he co-founded a hip-hop troupe called Starflam that made him a national heart-throb; aged 20 he spent four months in detention when Belgian officials unexpectedly refused to renew his visa, an experience that became the focus for his 2017 faux-feel good "refugee disco" song 'L'hiver Indien' (Indian Winter), included on the *FIFA 18* soundtrack, and 'La Derniere Pluie', in which he asserts that his music is '*too black for the whites and too white for the Blacks*.'

He'd been working in a film and record shop ("Obsessed with each new release") and on the verge of giving up music as a career when, in 2007, he got a letter from his mother, their first contact in 25 years. He recorded his autobiographical solo debut, *Hotel Impala*, in an attempt to tell her what he'd been up to. Their meeting did not go well: "There was a culture clash, a clash of expectations. Me and Congo had a tough time until I gave up trying to fit in. Once I accepted that I am from the diaspora, that the way I walk, talk and think is different, everything was fine."

This feeling of displacement – of artist-as-witness – dovetails with the narratives explored across Baloji's oeuvre. Of the Oscars selection for *Omen* (which unfortunately did not make the final shortlist of nominations for Best International Feature Film), he says "I am so pleased to be the Belgian candidate, knowing that I embody the Congo, knowing the weight of the colonial heritage that binds us."

"I hope we will see more and more African filmmakers at Cannes, at the Oscars. I come from the music world, and I know how difficult it is for musicians to have a career after two or three albums. But on a personal level it has given me a certain freedom to make a second film" – he won't be drawn on its content – "which is great because I love working."

He pauses for a beat. "Creativity is a muscle," he says. "I'm on a long journey. I have to keep it in shape." ◆

+ *Omen*, *the film, will be screened in the US from April 12 and in the UK from April 26, as well as other dates across Europe. The four Omen albums will be released digitally on April 5 (in addition to a vinyl release).*

Kristin Leen Moolman Wrong Men

Reasons to be Cheerful

Our preview of albums set to be released in 2024. From Finnish harmonica quartets to bona fide Senegalese legends, there's a lot to look forward to

Words by Russ Slater Johnson

SVÄNG

TITLE: *Svängo Nuevo*
LABEL: Galileo Music
RELEASE DATE: April 26

To celebrate 20 years of existence, the world's finest, and Finnish, harmonica quartet are releasing their 10th album. It also marks a change in approach. Whereas their last four albums worked with themes (Sibelius, tango, trad and their *Best Of* compilation) the latest is much looser, with all four members contributing songs – this includes Tapani Varis, who takes over bass harmonica duties from Pasi Leino. We've been told that there are songs inspired by the blues, by Argentine singer Melingo, by Finnish and Balkan folk dance and much more.

ZOË MODIGA

TITLE: TBC
LABEL: Yelloewax
RELEASE DATE: Early Summer

South African Modiga blew us away with the ambition of her last album, 2020's *INGANEKWANE*, and with live shows that never disappoint, we are understandably excited to hear there's a new work on the way. We haven't heard it yet, but fear not, here's Modiga to explain what she calls her "exciting, wildly-anticipated third studio project": "It is an offering that has been three years in the making, inspired by my grandmother... It has been crafted in celebration and exploration of the meanings of names, lineage, a higher self, maternal impact, matriarchy, divine feminine energy, spirituality and humanness. It hints at the choral, cinematic, ethereal, spirited, meditative, transcendent and otherworldly parts of who we are. It also seeks to inspire curiosity about how we interpret and engage with what we find in the wells of others and ourselves. We are curious about the spirit world as a means of reckoning, questioning, healing and transformation and we are excited to be sharing this new journey soon."

BAB L' BLUZ

TITLE: *Swaken*
LABEL: Real World Records
RELEASE DATE: May 10

Bab L' Bluz arrived with a bang in 2020 with their debut album *Nayda!*, which won Best Fusion album in the *Songlines Music Awards* 2021. Its success led to the group's busy schedule in the intervening years, and has had an undoubted impact on the sound of their follow-up. "Constant touring means we have grown in confidence and power," says Yousra Mansour, the Moroccan singer and electric *awisha* lute player, who co-founded the group with French guitarist and multi-instrumentalist Brice Bottin. "We adapted our sound for festival crowds, made it heavier, rockier. We added more instruments." "More courage. More fire," says Bottin, who adds: "You plug in your instrument, and you drive people crazy. Rock came from blues. Both are related to trance music. You can listen deeply, or headbang, and be completely taken over." Mansour mainly sings in Darija, a Moroccan-Arabic dialect, thoughout the album, tackling such topics as gender inequality, rising cases of suicide and depression in Morocco and the need for global unity. A case in point is lead single 'Imazighen', which celebrates the Indigenous people of North Africa and the need for the Amazigh and Arabic people of Morocco to celebrate each other's cultures.

Kimmo Syvari; Kim Atkins

YASMIN WILLIAMS

TITLE: *Harvest*
LABEL: Nonesuch
RELEASE DATE: June

When we interviewed fingerpicker extraordinaire Williams last year (August/September 2023, #190) we described her as '*an original, a genuine trailblazer, one of those rare musicians who challenges your preconceptions about the possible.*' Safe to say, we're big fans, so we were chuffed to hear that she had signed to Nonesuch – who are celebrating their 60th anniversary this year and have some surprises in store – and is playing bigger and bigger shows. She's already released a single with Aoife O'Donovan and we're excited to hear more.

Michael Mbwambo, Anna Šolcová © One World Records

THE ZAWOSE QUEENS

TITLE: *Maisha*
LABEL: Real World Records
RELEASE DATE: June 7

If you're thinking that the Zawose name looks familiar, then it may be because of the late, great Hukwe Zawose, who championed the music and culture of the Gogo ethnic group around the world, releasing a number of albums on Real World Records. Now, his daughter and granddaughter, Leah and Pendo Zawose, are to continue the family business with a wonderful debut album. With assistance from producers Oli Barton-Wood and Tom Excell, this one oscillates from thumping bass-heavy polyrhythms to those more familiar to fans of Tanzanian music, *illimba* thumb pianos, *ngoma* drums and *chizeze* fiddles at the ready. Throughout though, it's the sound of the Queens' harmonies that dominates.

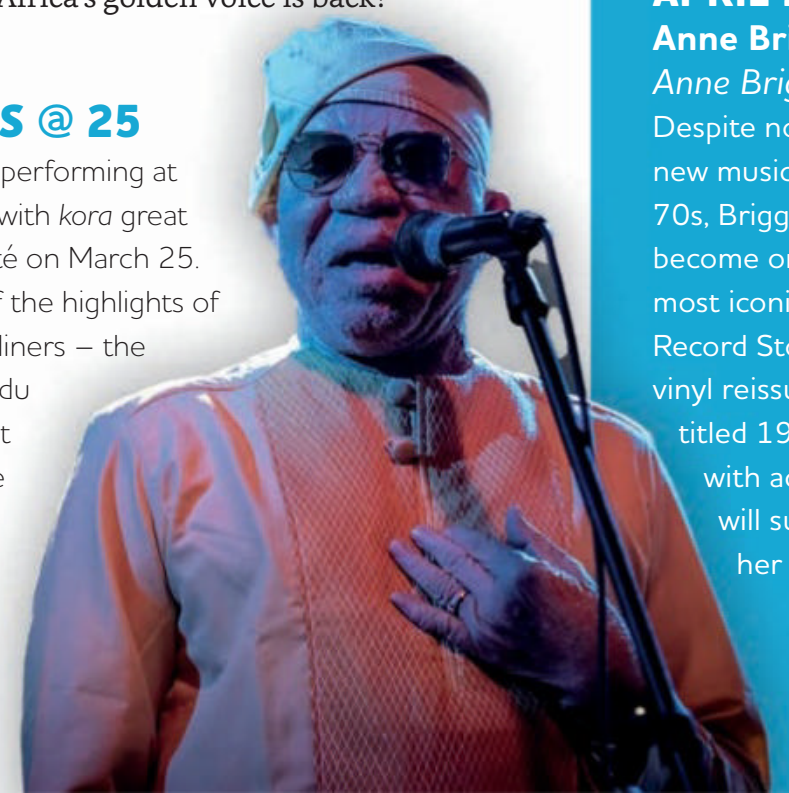
SALIF KEITA

TITLE: TBC
LABEL: NØ FØRMAT!
RELEASE DATE: Summer

At the end of last year Salif Keita played a sparse number of shows with an acoustic trio; we heard that their performance at Japan's KYOTOPHONIE festival was simply stunning. Even better news is that he's now recorded an album with his acoustic group, with NØ FØRMAT! to release the results. Africa's golden voice is back!

SONGLINES @ 25

Don't miss Salif Keita performing at the Barbican, London with *kora* great Mamadou Sidiki Diabaté on March 25. Their duet will be one of the highlights of a concert with four headliners – the others being Le Vent du Nord, Balimaya Project and Divanhana – as we celebrate 25 years of *Songlines*. Tickets via bit.ly/songlines25th



TOPIC RECORDS 85TH ANNIVERSARY

That pillar of British folk music has turned 85 this year – somehow making our 25th birthday excitement seem a little premature – and wonderfully, they are already in full swing with a fine reissue campaign underway and talk of a special event later this year. Here's what we can announce so far:

FEB 23
Martin Carthy
Martin Carthy
Vinyl reissue of his legendary 1965 debut.

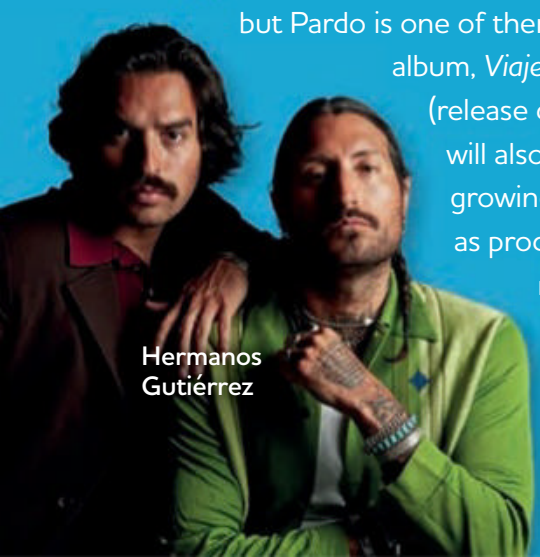
MARCH 8
Angeline Morrison
The Sorrow Songs
A coloured vinyl reissue of Morrison's stunning 2022 reimagining of a Black British folk song heritage.

APRIL 12
Martin Simpson
Skydancers
A brand-new album from Simpson, his 15th for Topic, which features traditionals and originals, including a new one commissioned by Chris Packham about the endangered Hen Harrier.

APRIL 19
Anne Briggs
Anne Briggs
Despite not releasing any new music since the early 70s, Briggs has gone on to become one of English folk's most iconic singers, and this Record Store Day deluxe vinyl reissue of her self-titled 1971 debut album with accompanying 7" will surely only add to her legacy.

ALSO UPCOMING...

RICHARD THOMPSON is back with *Ship to Shore* on New West in May, which he recorded in Woodstock, New York, in 2022... **THE GOBLIN BAND** were born out of informal sessions at HobGoblin Music, a folk instrument shop in London, and they've already got some famous fans (Martin Carthy among them). Their debut album, *Come Slack Your Horse!*, will be out May 1... **ANGELINE MORRISON**, **COHEN BRAITHWAITE-KILCOYNE** & **JON BICKLEY** have joined forces to mark 'Amazing Grace''s 250th anniversary and the 300th anniversary of its writer, John Newton's, birth. *Grace Will Lead Me Home* will be out May 17 on Invisible Folk... Swiss-Ecuadorian brothers **HERMANOS GUTIÉRREZ** have a sound all their own, with a dash of Latin, a dash of Americana and the kind of guitar interplay that only siblings could possess. Their new album, *Sonido Cósmico*, is out June 14 on Easy Eye Sound... Cyprus' Antonis Antoniou of Monsieur Doumani has a new ensemble, **BUZZ' AYAZ**, with a self-titled album due out in September via Glitterbeat Records. A mixture of Eastern Mediterranean psych, dub, tribal beats and dicey Anatolian grooves, the first single 'Zali' is a wild foretelling of what's to come... After her cameo on Syriana's *1325 Ibn Battutah* (reviewed on p57), **OLCAY BAYIR** will release a new album on May 24 via ARC Music. It's described as '*a collection of Kurdish Alevi soul-infused songs*' that honour her '*multicultural and multilinguistic background*'... *Oud* player **TAREK ABDALLAH** and percussionist **ADEL SHAMS EL DIN** are following 2015's *Wasla* (a Top of the World in #107) with *Ousoul* (out March 15 on Buda Musique), another astonishing exploration of *wasla* suites full of improvisation... **INDUS** have been making a name for themselves in Colombia for their energetic take on Afro-Caribbean rhythms since their 2020 debut. Their latest, *Negra*, will be out June 21 on ZZK Records, who are also releasing an album by their frequent collaborator, **EL LEON PARDO**. There are not many artists daring to take the *gaita* (Indigenous flute) into new territories, but Pardo is one of them. His new album, *Viaje Sideral* (release date TBC), will also highlight his growing confidence as producer and master of a number of instruments.


Hermanos Gutiérrez

Jim Herrington

SONIC INTERVENTIONS

TITLE: TBC
LABEL: Agogo Records
RELEASE DATE: September 2024

It began in 2020 with the Out Of Time Embassy and a group of cultural workers in Berlin who wanted to build bridges, create safe spaces and embody international unity. They started producing concerts and one, Sonic In(ter)ventions, curated in the wake of the Black Lives Matter protests, took flight. Happening weekly in the open air, out of necessity due to the global pandemic, those jam sessions became a tight collective of musicians and Sonic Interventions, the band, was born. With members hailing from South Africa, Morocco, Peru, Australia and all points in between, they are flying the flag for multiculturality and have become one of the most talked about underground jazz collectives around after recent festival appearances at Jazz Montez Frankfurt and Berlin's XAZZ! . If you like Balimaya Project, Bab L' Bluz, Afrobeat and the groovier end of jazz, you're going to love this lot.

WARSAW VILLAGE BAND & BASSAŁYKI

TITLE: *Roots Electrificated*
LABEL: Karrot Kommando
RELEASE DATE: TBC

On their 2015 *Sun Celebration* album (celebrated in our 25th anniversary issue, #195), Warsaw Village Band proved they were masters of collaborating with international artists while still sounding unequivocally Slavic. While the big-name collaborations on that album were Spain's Mercedes Peón, Iran's Kayhan Kalhor and India's Sanjay Khan, there were also tracks like 'Perkun's Fire' which featured Polish DJ Feel-X which showed the group's love for bass music. This interest is set to come to the fore on their forthcoming album with BASSałyki. They tell us that as well as their core line-up of "female vocals, violins, old Polish fiddles, dulcimer and traditional frame drums," they have added three players from BASSałyki, "resulting in a rich and full soundscape enhanced by powerful bass and drum riddims, contemporary keyboard melodies and a crunchy brass section." The extended group have already played some live dates, and are true to their word. This is Warsaw Village with a substantial low-end enhancement, and all the extra power it brings. Perhaps they could call it the Slavic Sound System.

CELEBRATE IN THE SUN

As it's our 25th anniversary year we are arranging some special treats for our readers, and that includes some of the most exciting prizes we've ever offered. This issue, you could win one of ten copies of Warsaw Village Band's astonishing album, *Sun Celebration*. It's not easy getting hold of this anymore, so if you'd like a copy, you know what needs to happen.

WIN
Tell us: what is the name of Warsaw Village Band's upcoming 2024 album?
See p23 for competition rules

MOSTAR SEVDAH REUNION

TITLE: TBC
LABEL: Snail Records
RELEASE DATE: Late Summer / Autumn

No wonder we've always felt an affinity with Bosnian *sevdah* ensemble Mostar Sevdah Reunion: they're also turning 25 this year. And, to celebrate, they're preparing a very special new album with collaborators from around the world. Cameroonian guitarist Muntu Valdo has already recorded his parts, and the group are now on the hunt for a flamenco singer to help on a Gypsy standard. "We want to go a bit crazy for our 25th anniversary album," Mostar Sevdah Reunion's founder and producer Dragi Sestic tells *Songlines*. "The overdubs are taking some time," he says, "but anyway, in that case it will be a real 25th anniversary because the first one was released in October 1999."

AYOM

TITLE: *Sa.Li.Va*
LABEL: TBC
RELEASE DATE: September

We described AYOM's self-titled debut as '*an intoxicating dose of entrancing ritual magic*,' and we remained intoxicated as they took home Best Group at 2021's *Songlines Music Awards*. With members from Brazil, Angola, Greece and Italy their Afro-Lusophone music is always fluid and inclusive, and they accentuate those traits on *Sa.Li.Va*, aiming to '*overcome the gap between genres, languages and musical styles.*' They have enlisted Brazilian producer Guilherme Kastrup, who helmed Elza Soares' astonishing *A Mulher do Fim do Mundo* (Woman at the End of the World) album, so are in safe hands.

ORCHESTRA BAOBAB

TITLE: *Made in Senegal* [Working Title]
LABEL: Madoky
RELEASE DATE: Late 2024

The legendary Senegalese group are set to release their first new album since 2017's *Tribute to Ndiouga Dieng*. That album was a homage to one of the group's singers, Ndiouga Dieng, who passed away in 2016. Since then, other key members have passed – Barthélémy Attisso, Issa Cissokho, Charlie Ndiaye – so it's no surprise that there will once more be tributes, with the proposed first single, 'Irala', paying dues to all those former Baobabs no longer with us. With vocals by Ndiouga Dieng's son Alpha Dieng and Mountaga Koite's son Zaccaria Koité aka Papino, it certainly seems like the group is in fine hands and continuing their astonishing legacy. *Made in Senegal*, which is the current working title, is being seen as a follow-up to 2007's *Made in Dakar*, and the group have told us it will "showcase the musical diversity of Senegal (Casamance, Serere, Pular) through Orchestra Baobab's unique touch." Expect to hear that first single after Ramadan.

Asmâa and Aicha Hamzaoui

Swing Out SISTERS

With her all-female band, **Asmâa Hamzaoui** is a trailblazer for Moroccan music. ***Jo Frost*** speaks to Asmâa and her sister Aicha about Gnawa traditions that have been passed down through generations, and the need for women to express themselves in their culture

With its low and resonant thud, the sound of the *gimbri* is unmistakable and once heard, never forgotten. The three-stringed bass lute is an intrinsic part of Gnawa music, along with the shrill clattering of *qaraqabs* (metal castanets), call-and-response vocals and ululations.

The exact origin of Gnawa culture and its music is much debated, but it's widely believed to have been present in Morocco within the Sufi brotherhoods since at least the 16th century. A heady mix of African, Arabic and Amazigh (Berber) cultures, folklore and mysticism, the world of Gnawa has been almost exclusively male – until now.

At the forefront of this sea change is Asmâa Hamzaoui, Morocco's leading female *maalma* (spiritual master), and her all-female group Bnat Timbouktou (Daughters of Timbuktu).

Asmâa and her group first made waves back in 2019 when they released their debut international album *Oulad Lghaba* (Children of the Forest) with the Swedish label ajabu!. "Gnawa music is about history, suffering, as well as joy," Asmâa told me back in 2019 when we spoke before her showcase at WOMEX in Tampere. Asmâa Hamzaoui '*feels warrior-like… There are big things to come*,' wrote Jane Cornwell in her review of *Oulad Lghaba* (in #154).

Then, of course, COVID hit and everything promptly stopped. Asmâa and her band gave some notable online performances from their home in Casablanca during this hiatus, including one in 2021 for the WOW Festival. Now Asmâa is set to release her long-awaited follow-up and is preparing to take her band on tour again, including their first proper headline show in the UK at *Songlines Encounters Festival* in May.

The new album is called *L'Bnat*, (Daughters). Asmâa is the youngest of two daughters of the renowned *maalem*, Rachid Hamzaoui. His eldest daughter is Aicha (30), Asmâa's sister, who flanks her on stage, singing and playing qaraqabs.

She also acts as Asmâa's spokesperson when we catch up on the phone.

Before we discuss *L'Bnat*, Aicha tells me about their childhood: "We grew up with Gnawa music," she explains. "Other maalems came to our house to play gimbri or qaraqabs; they came to learn with our father. It was like a school of Gnawa music, something we're very proud of."

Asmâa was seven when their father began teaching her the gimbri. While being interviewed for *AFP* last year, she asked: "Why shouldn't a woman play the gimbri? Why shouldn't women be part of this dynamic? … The day I had the opportunity to play the gimbri and succeeded… I didn't hesitate for a second." Traditionally during the *lila* (all-night trance session) women are the *moqademe* (healers) who are responsible for preparing the ceremonies, inviting the sick, burning the incense and calling up the spirits in front of the maalem.

But Asmâa was determined to keep on playing the gimbri and, with the encouragement of her father and mother, formed Bnat Timbouktou in 2012.

Asmâa may have been the first Moroccan woman to publicly wield a gimbri onstage but there have been other gimbri trailblazers, namely Algeria's Hasna El Becharia, who is now in her 70s. Both Hasna and Asmâa appeared at Arabesques Festival in Montpellier last September (reviewed in #193).

The most renowned place to experience the music in situ is in Essaouira at the Gnawa and World Music Festival. Held every June (bar the COVID years) since 1998, it's been instrumental in changing attitudes towards Gnawa music and its practitioners, who often were seen as outcasts, given the mysterious and spiritual nature of their practices. Fans of Gnawa music have included Pharoah Sanders, Don Cherry, Robert Plant, Wayne Shorter and Snarky Puppy, and the influx of international artists who come to Essaouira each year has seen the music become fully accepted and an important part of Morocco's vibrant contemporary culture.

Asmâa made her own debut at the festival in 2017, aged 20. She returned the following year and gave a memorable performance with the Malian singer Fatoumata Diawara. "Asmâa is very open to collaboration," her sister tells me, "but there has to be a spiritual connection, like with Fatou, who told Asmâa she gave her the energy to dance and sing."

Asmâa Hamzaoui (second from right) & Bnat Timbouktou at Festival Arabesques 2023

Another notable collaboration that boosted Asmâa's profile among British music lovers saw her join forces in 2019 with Kate Stables (This Is The Kit). They worked together for *The Sound Odyssey*, a BBC Radio 4 series (available on BBC Sounds).

An indication that Morocco's patriarchal attitudes – at least in event programming – are changing was noticeable at last year's Gnawa and World Music Festival when Asmâa played the Saturday night headline slot on the largest stage at Place Moulay Hassan, alongside another all-female supergroup, Les Amazones d'Afrique. Asmâa is no longer the sole female brandishing a gimbri onstage, as Yousra Mansour from Bab L' Bluz and Hind Ennaira are also players, though they usually perform alongside male musicians.

> "WE **GREW UP** WITH GNAWA MUSIC. **MAALEMS** CAME TO OUR HOUSE TO PLAY ***GIMBRI*** OR ***QARAQABS***… IT WAS LIKE A **SCHOOL OF GNAWA**"

The other marked difference Aicha is keen to point out is that while there is a lot of Gnawa fusion around, Asmâa is "100% traditional Gnawa – she's rooted in this tradition. It's a difficult tradition to master: the rhythms, the words, the lyrics and stories."

Even though she's still only in her 20s, Asmâa embodies the essence of this tradition, as can be heard on *L'Bnat's* opening track. As the bluesy, pentatonic twang of the gimbri kicks off, Asmâa proclaims '*Gnawa!*' while her group join in with call-and-response vocals, underpinned by skittering qaraqabs. The tracks are predominantly named after women, so there's 'Mira' and 'Malika' (both princesses), and 'Aicha' who, as well as being a revered female saint, like Mira, was also sister to the late King Hassan II, a champion of women's rights in Morocco and an ambassador to the UK in the 60s. All the names are prefixed by 'Lalla', an Amazigh word used to address women, similar to 'Your Highness' or 'Madame'. It's a celebration of all women, Aicha tells me, except for the final bonus track 'Sadati', which pays homage to the late maalem Mahmoud Gania (or Guinea), an iconic Gnawa music figure, who died in 2015. He sang this on his last album, *Colours of the Night* (released in 2017), and invited Asmâa and her band to sing the backing vocals. "He was an inspiration to Asmâa and gave us the conviction to perform, despite the fact that we're women," explains Aicha. "This was our way to say thank you."

There's a synaesthetic quality about the music that conjures up images of people dancing in trance, musicians in bright tunics adorned with cowrie shells, twirling tassels on their caps along to a sound that increases in tempo and intensity. Different colours are associated with different spirits, especially during the lila. As Aicha explains, their last album was black in colour due to Gnawa's slavery roots. *L'Bnat*, she says, is full of colour, especially yellow (for energy) and green (associated with nature and royalty). She also reminds me that her sister really is the whole package: Asmâa sings, dances, plays the gimbri and partakes in the lila as a maalma – just like her father, and all the great maalems before her. Now Asmâa and her sisterhood are ready to remind audiences that it's not just about the patriarchy, as, to quote another great singer, the sisters are doing it for themselves. ◆

+ ***L'Bnat*** *will be released by ajabu! on May 10.* ***Asmâa Hamzaoui & Bnat Timbouktou*** *will perform at Kings Place, London on May 16, as part of Songlines Encounters*

Wael Ben Abbou, Luc Jennepin

Rebel JOY

Charis McGowan finds Chilean rapper **Ana Tijoux** in a reflective mood as she talks about her much-awaited new album. “I wanted to create something more complete, take time to write a different type of album,” she confides

"I don't know if joyful is the right word, but I wanted to make an album that didn't repeat the same formula," says Ana Tijoux about her latest album, *Vida*. Her first full-length release in nine years, it's been hard to predict the direction that the Chilean MC would take after such a lengthy hiatus.

Her fifth solo album to date, *Vida* takes a drastic turn from her most recent standalone songs: 2019's 'Cacerolazo' and 2020's 'Antifa Dance', both defiant protest anthems released in the aftermath of a nationwide uprising against inequality in Chile, which was met with fierce repression from the state. The tracks fit neatly into her two-decade-spanning career of soundtracking injustice, at first with Chilean hip-hop group Makiza in the 1990s, and then as a solo artist in the 2000s.

In the past, Tijoux has mixed throwback beats, brassy Latin horns and wind instruments with lyrics that called out the corrupt ('Los Peces Gordos No Pueden Volar'), fought against misogyny ('Antipatriarca') and expressed solidarity with Chilean youth's decades-long struggle for equal education rights ('Shock'). Hence, "joyful" marks a distinct shift for an artist whose work is so intrinsically tied to political rage. "If I didn't smile, I'd sink," she says, "it's really hard to write about happiness, but I lost a lot of people in a short amount of time, and I needed to move my energy in a different direction."

'Tania' is one of *Vida*'s first singles, named after her late sister. The song is an uplifting tribute, with ska trumpet bursts and a danceable *cumbia* rhythm. "I'm not sure if *Vida* is a homage [to the people I've lost], but it is a reflection on life and all of its nuances," contemplates Tijoux.

Despite the nine-year hiatus, *Vida* came together in just one year. Tijoux had been busy: "I was travelling a lot," she reflects – she moved from Chile to Europe, spent time raising her children and was not in one place long enough to work on a longer project. When she began working on *Vida*, she knew she needed time and space: "I wanted to create something more complete, take time to write a different type of album."

Standout tracks on *Vida* are reminiscent of her early work with Makiza, integrating the classic 90s hip-hop sound that underscores her work: The Notorious B.I.G.'s 'Juicy' is deliciously interpolated on throwback track 'Tu Sae', which features Brooklyn legend Talib Kweli from rap duo Black Star.

Despite the echoes of her back catalogue, Tijoux describes *Vida* as a "musical" record rather than a pure rap one, where her vocals as a singer take centre stage. 'Cora' is a melodic, moving reflection on the beat of a heart, the pulsating rhythm reflecting a will to dance through life, as something corporally innate to mankind. These moments of reflections and gratitude are also present on songs like 'Millonaria': '*I'm a millionaire… I have a family who embraces me*,' she sings in Spanish, a piano-driven ode to what truly enriches life.

Javiera Gajardo; Miguel Santos; Nacho Rojas

"Demanding a fairer world has to do with wanting a good life, right? It's a perspective that is filled with happiness"

Tijoux explains her appreciation of joy as something intangibly connected to her lifelong dialogue with equality and justice. "I am privileged. There are no bombs falling over me, my children are healthy, there is food on the table." Several times in our interview, Tijoux mentions Gaza. Chile is home to one of the largest Palestinian communities outside of the Middle East, creating a strong connection between Chile and the Palestinian struggle for freedom. Tijoux has numerous Palestinian friends and collaborated with Palestinian-British rapper Shadia Mansour on the 2014 protest song 'Somos Sur'. When war broke out last year, Tijoux immediately used her platform to express solidarity, organising and performing at a large festival in Santiago to raise funds for medical aid in Gaza.

"If you look at the youth in Gaza, they are still doing workshops in the camps, teaching children how to juggle, or dance. In the middle of everything, they keep finding life within the absurd," she said. "I find so much strength in that, to get up on my feet, to keep walking, to sing. It gives me oxygen." That's why Tijoux's celebration of happiness is integral to her vision of resistance and collective action. "We have to share with our friends, ask each other how we are, what we're going to do for each other, call our Palestinian friends and tell them we love them, we're here for them."

The first single off the album, 'Niñx', is a bold message of empowerment to future generations, and one of *Vida*'s most politically charged. A synthesizer trill is intercut by a jutting marching beat that builds into an explosive chorus, recalling the march of protest drums. '*You have your grandmother's eyes / you carry power / we are the rocks sprung from the riots*,' she spits in a rallying cry to dance and sing with pride despite life's challenges. Tijoux says she wrote the song for one of her children, "to never lose the joyful rebellion," she recounts. "Demanding a fairer world has to do with wanting a good life, right? It's a perspective that is filled with happiness."

Now 46, Tijoux's desire to engage with younger generations extends from her lyrics into the very fabric of her songs. One of the album's most aggressive moments, 'Dime Que', is a furious trap track with Chilean rapper Pablo Chill-E, an artist at the forefront of a new generation of Chilean urban artists. It's a seething exploration of justice and privilege, '*I miss my brothers behind bars*,' raps Chill-E, who examines how the system criminalises the poor and protects the wealthy: '*The politicians steal the money that your grandma pays her bills with*.' The song bears testimony to Tijoux's towering presence in Chile's political rap traditions, a genre synonymous with giving voice to ▸

> **“Everything was changed [in Chile], only to go back to Pinochet’s constitution. It’s surreal”**

the marginalised in an unforgivingly unequal society. Such ideas remain as significant and relevant today as when she began to make music during Chile’s dawning democracy. Tijoux’s parents were persecuted under Pinochet’s torturous 17-year regime, forcing them to flee to France, where Tijoux spent her youth until democracy was restored in the 1990s. The members of Makiza were all children of exiles, an experience that shaped the political nature of their work.

Even today, Pinochet’s dark shadow continues to stir tension in Chile. In the aftermath of the 2019 protests, Chileans sought to change their ruling constitution, a relic from Pinochet’s regime. However, the process has proved frustrating and polarising. After two attempts – one radically liberal, the other extremely conservative – Chileans voted to keep the 1980 charter. “Everything was changed, just to go back to Pinochet’s constitution. It’s surreal,” says Tijoux,

In the face of such absurdity, to struggle for change and go back to square one, Tijoux refuses to be consumed by anger. This is something she views as an act of sheer resistance. ‘*I decided to be happy*,’ she sings blissfully on breezy track ‘Bailando Sola Aquí’ (Dancing Alone Here).

In ‘Fin del Mundo’ (End of the World) hushed vocals, pop harmonies and soft keys are lusciously layered onto a pulsating electro beat. The last track of *Vida*, it is a neat conclusion of her philosophy; at times the only thing left is company and joy, which is worth celebrating until the very end: ‘*They say at any moment the world will end… / and if the world’s end does come / let’s dance naked together.*’ ◆

+ *Vida* *will be reviewed next issue; (on sale April 5) ‘Tania’ features on our compilation, track 12.* ***Ana Tijoux*** *will perform at the Village Underground, London on April 13 as part of La Linea 24*

THREE STEPS TO *VIDA*

Tijoux’s career spans two decades and a host of explorations. Here, we pick three albums that track her journey to the latest project

Makiza
Aerolineas Makiza
(Sony Music Chile, 1999)
Tijoux was born in France after her parents fled Chile during the dictatorship. When her family returned to Chile in 1993 she soon immersed herself in a nascent rap scene emerging in Santiago and Buenos Aires, and her group Makiza became one of the breakout artists. Themes of fascism and exile were all over tracks like ‘En Paro (feat Epicentro)’ and ‘La Rosa de los Vientos’.

Ana Tijoux
1977
(Nacional Records, 2010)
With its cinematic opening sample, the autobiographical title-track showed Tijoux’s intent here instantly: it showed her laying her emotions bare and determined to do things her own way, hallmarks of the album. It was also her breakthrough song, featuring on FIFA video games and the award-winning US TV series *Breaking Bad*. Tijoux the solo artist had arrived.

Ana Tijoux
Vengo
(Nacional Records, 2014)
If her earlier work had been centred on Chile and finding her own identity, then *Vengo* saw her embrace the rest of Latin America, and further afield. There are references to Eduardo Galeano, dalliances with *cumbia* and lots of panpipes. ‘Somos Sur’, with Palestinian MC Shadia Mansour, equated the situation in Palestine with that in Latin America, imploring former colonial powerhouses to step aside.

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RICH TAPESTRY

Simon Broughton attends A Tapestry of Sacred Music in Singapore to discover a festival offering devotion to more than just the devotees

A diamond-shaped island, half the size of London, with roughly five and a half million people, squeezed between Malaysia and Indonesia, Singapore is perhaps an ideal place for a sacred music festival. It's a country of diverse people – mainly of Chinese, Malay, Indian and Eurasian backgrounds – and is full of temples, mosques, churches, *gurdwaras* and more. A Tapestry of Sacred Music has tapped into this multi-faith society since 2009 by, according to their producer Tan Xiang Hui last year, granting '*rare access to music that is often cloistered within places of worship*.'

In last year's edition, a performance by the Sikh Music Academy on an open-air stage in front of Singapore Harbour against a background of city skyscrapers was a truly unforgettable sight. In their main concert, an ensemble of eight (male and female vocalists, harmoniums, *rubab*, *tabla* and *dholak*) played devotional *kirtans* from different times of the day. The music is very compelling with broad call-and-response melodies and beautiful instrumentals; I found myself wondering why Sikh music is so little heard outside of their gurdwaras. And I was not surprised that the Singapore-based Gurmat Sangeet Academy has been invited every year to the festival.

After the performance they explained that this ensemble is much larger than would be heard in a gurdwara – "in the gurdwara it's perhaps a little more sober, and here a little more flamboyant," said Dilbagh Singh. I was also impressed by the women taking part. "There's a popular scripture by our first guru, Guru Nanak, talking about the equality of women. It was quite a revolutionary thought in the 1400s," he continued. "Women take part in all religious, cultural, social and secular activities. A woman can be a head priest as well as a singer in our kirtans."

Guru Nanak (1469-1539) travelled and spread the message of Sikhism with a (Muslim-born) musician called Bhai Mardana who played a plucked rubab. This explained the Afghan rubab in the ensemble, although Bhai Mardana's instrument was probably something different. Music is very important in Sikhism and the Guru Granth Sahib had particular *ragas* assigned to each section, too. The tabla player Rajeshpal Singh told me about *partaal* (changing rhythm), "a unique thing in Sikh music where every time the stanza changes the beat changes. This was created by our Sikh gurus."

> "WE SAY WE ARE A **MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY** BUT WE DON'T HAVE A LOT OF **ACCESS** TO EACH OTHER'S **RELIGIOUS LIVES**"

A Tapestry of Sacred Music is free to enter and held at Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay, a spectacular contemporary arts complex including a large 'classical' concert hall, smaller studio spaces and a concourse area as well as the outdoor stage alongside bars and restaurants. "The festival showcases religious and sacred music and different faith traditions in a neutral setting," explained the producer Tan Xiang Hui. "In Singapore we like to say we are a multicultural society but in truth we don't have a lot of access to each other's religious lives. Often these art forms are in places of worship or within community settings and if you don't have access to these places you are unaware of them."

Clockwise from top left: *The Ritual Theatre of Edo Kagura*; *Songs from a Sufi Shrine*; *Wungubal Sacred Songs*; a performance of *kuda kepang*; *Chöd: Tantric Songs of Healing*; The Sikh Academy

Right: A Javanese *kuda kepang* dancer and her *rattan* horse

Simon Broughton; Alvin Ho (Courtesy of Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay)

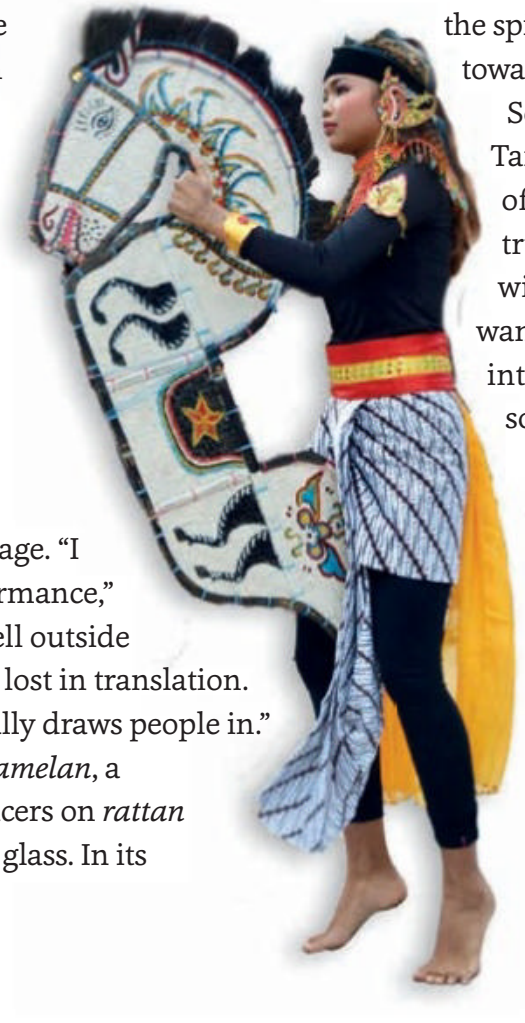
The range of performances was surprisingly wide. Alongside groups from Singapore like the Sikh Academy and a Javanese group performing *kuda kepang*, there was Byzantine Chant, French pipe organ music, Japanese ritual theatre, Tibetan Buddhist chant, Cuban Santería drumming, masked *chhau* dance from India and, of course, *qawwali*, also from India. The Qutbi Brothers from Delhi – six of them in the large concert hall – created an incredible rapport with the audience. They performed many of the greatest qawwali hits ('Allah Hoo' and 'Dama Dam Mast Qalandar') but kept stopping and urging people to sing along which the audience readily did. I've rarely seen such great interaction between singers and audience; there were plenty there who knew the words.

Some of these performances were quite traditional, others rather different in approach. Australian Aboriginal singer Ngulmiya Nundhirribala performed traditional songs from Arnhem Land but arranged for piano and string quartet. It's a remarkable way of taking little-known traditional music and presenting it on a stage. "I was really excited about Ngulmiya's performance," said Tan. "Not every art form translates well outside of its community and something [can get] lost in translation. Ngulmiya creates a sort of show which really draws people in."

The kuda kepang involved a ten-piece *gamelan*, a ringmaster with a whip, young female dancers on *rattan* horses and hot coals and (pretend) broken glass. In its traditional form in Java it's a sort of possession ritual which can involve walking on coals and eating broken glass. In Singapore, there's some sensitivity around this: as a secular state this trance ritual can't be presented as a religious event. In the introduction it was carefully described as "a performative version." It was spectacular to watch, involving a battle between a good king and a bad king and the horses regularly going to the gamelan as if to feed. Afterwards the organiser Iswan Diargo (or Wan Di) explained: "The horses are trying to go and listen to the sound of the gongs, because the gamelan gives them a focal point for the spirit to be possessed in the body. They have to go towards the gongs to be possessed by the music."

Some of the performances felt too short, but for Tan it was a matter of finding a balance. "Many of these ceremonies take days or all night so we try to construct a balance between what people will like and the actual thing itself. We don't want to overwhelm our audience and make it too intimidating. At the same time, it's to appreciate something beautiful from another culture."

This year's festival, the 15th, includes Mir Mukhtiyar Ali from Rajasthan, Tibetan drum dancers, Balinese temple performers as well as Huun-Huur-Tu and the Sikh Music Academy in a special Vaisakhi performance. ◆



+ *A Tapestry of Sacred Music* *will take place at Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay, Singapore on April 12-14. Details at esplanade.com/tapestry*

Reviews

We review full-length world music, roots and folk albums (not singles or EPs), available on CD, digital or vinyl.
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Europe *50*
Middle East *57*
Asia & Pacific *58*
Fusion *60*

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Emahoy Tsege-Mariam Gebru
Souvenirs

Mississippi Records

★★★★½

The world lost a unique composer with the passing of Emahoy Tsege-Mariam Gebru at the age of 99 last year. Her beguiling piano melodies that mix Ethiopian and European classical and religious music marked her as a true original. Now, *Souvenirs* shows a different side of her music.

This is the first full release of Tsege-Mariam's vocal music, home recordings of her singing her own songs in Amharic, accompanied by that unmistakable piano. Recorded in Addis Ababa between 1977 and 1985, these are special, emotional recordings – one need only listen to the opener 'Clouds Moving on the Sky' to feel it. We also hear some of her most Ethiopian moments here: 'Ready to Leave' is a *tezeta*, a song of wistful yearning and loss, and it's almost as if the piano takes the role of a giant *krar* lyre.

These are lovely songs. However, whether it is because of the lyrics-focussed nature of these pieces or the less-optimal quality of the amateur recordings, this set doesn't quite give the revelatory, otherworldly experience of Tsege-Mariam's solo piano works. Nevertheless, *Souvenirs* remains a special, touching album that adds to the beautiful legacy of a much-missed musical genius.

JIM HICKSON

TRACK TO TRY *Ready to Leave*

IBAAKU
Joola Jazz

Blanc Manioc

★★★★½

Eight years since the release of his previous record *Alien Cartoon*, Senegalese electro-jazz artist IBAAKU has returned with a stunning new project, *Joola Jazz*. Exhibiting a true alchemy of musical influences, IBAAKU's sound blends the traditional Casamance music of his ancestral homeland with the infectious sounds of African electronic club music, the edgy urban rhythms of hip-hop and the spiritual spontaneity of jazz. The result is a highly charismatic and richly layered album that simultaneously draws inspiration from the traditions of history and the technologies of modernity.

Joola Jazz opens with 'Bombolong' and 'Bukut', two intoxicatingly danceable tracks with crystalline electronic melodies that soar over fat synth basslines and dense polyrhythmic drumming. 'Jazz Griots (feat Alibeta)' functions as a groovy acoustic piano interlude which provides an ingenious contrast in texture and a sense of improvisational freedom. Disorientating microtonal melodic motifs and metallic percussive sounds dominate on 'Ajamat Computer', with alto saxophone jazz lines and electric piano swells taking centre stage on 'Bumiro'. The album ends with 'Ancestral Intelligence', a spiritual climax in which a pulsating, almost mechanical beat wrestles rhythmically with nimble *djembé* drumming.

At once historically grounded and forward-thinking, IBAAKU's *Joola Jazz* is intellectually provocative and an uninhibited sonic joy.

TOM SPARGO

TRACK TO TRY *Jazz Griots*

London Afrobeat Collective

London Afrobeat Collective
Esengo

Canopy Records

★★★★½

Given that Afrobeat was born out of a creative culture clash – funk meeting highlife for a riotous party – it's natural that it should continue to evolve as it does on this latest offering from the acclaimed eight-piece London Afrobeat Collective. Juanita Euka's sinuously smooth vocals lead the way across the piece; she has a distinctive style and confident musicality that really help shape the sound. Behind her, though, the funk and soul horns synchronise perfectly with the flawless rhythm section and blissful guitars – just as you would expect from a quality Afrobeat album. Here and there other influences come to the fore, the group slip into a funk-infused Latin jazz style on 'Take Me to the Sea' for instance which then turns to nod towards dub in its second act. Elsewhere you might pick up references to more traditional musical patterns, just as you might think that the opening bars of the polemical 'Freedom' owe something to the Afro Celts – although it swiftly transitions away from such comparisons. Fundamentally, *Esengo* is a great record. Full of musical inventiveness, passionate and political, London Afrobeat Collective stay faithful to their roots but not unnecessarily constrained by them. A lot of fun.

SIMON CROSS

TRACK TO TRY *My Way*

TOP OF THE WORLD TRACK 1

Aziza Brahim
Mawja

Glitterbeat Records

★★★★½

The Sahrawi refugee camps are situated out in the deserts of southern Algeria, and are home to the victims of one of the tragedies that the world has largely forgotten. They are exiles from the coastal region that they call 'Occupied Western Sahara', a former Spanish colony which was annexed by Morocco in 1975, and has remained under Moroccan control. A UN-brokered ceasefire ended 16 years of guerrilla warfare back in 1991, but there has been no sign of the agreed referendum on independence and in the past four years the fighting has continued.

Life can be bleak in the camps, as those who have visited them will know, but there is pride, defiance and a great musical tradition. Artists have played a major role in publicising the plight of the Sahrawis, and since the death of the great Mariem Hassan in 2015, Aziza Brahim has become the best-known singer keeping the musical fight, and the culture, alive. Born in the camps, she left to study in Cuba and then to live in Spain, but the story and struggle of her people still dominate her work.

This is Brahim's fourth album for Glitterbeat, and it's up there with *Soutak* (2014) as one of her best to date. It's a brave and emotional set in which she wisely ignores fancy production work and chooses to match her soulful vocals against percussion and the guitar and bass work of long-time collaborator Guillem Aguilar, who co-produced the set with Brahim. There's a live feel to many of the tracks on *Mawja*, along with a welcome blend of energy and subtlety. After all, the percussion involves not just Brahim's *tabal* hand drum, but folk instruments that she's heard during her time in Spain, including tambourines and mortar and pestle used in cooking.

The album starts with Brahim singing unaccompanied, before first percussion and then acoustic guitar move in, bringing an attacking edge to the set. Aguilar switches to electric guitar for the second track 'Thajliba', introducing a more raw, bluesy feel, before switching to a slower, laid-back blues style on 'Duaa', which again matches guitar work against sturdy percussion. This is the first of two songs in which Brahim pays tribute to her late grandmother, a poet who played an important role in the refugee camps.

Elsewhere, the album includes the upbeat and tuneful blues 'Metal, Madera', with electric guitar responding to her vocals, and percussion that was apparently inspired by The Clash. And there are further reminders of Sahrawi culture and history on the title-track (meaning 'wave' in Hassaniya Arabic), which is a reminder of the hours the young Brahim would spend listening to music on the radio, while 'Bubisher' matches breathy, thoughtful vocals against gently driving percussion for a song about a bird that is said to bring good news.

The mood changes again with the urgent and powerful 'Haiyu Ya Zuwar', in which she revives a popular song of Sahrawi resistance, now treated to clattering percussion and added guitar work from Raúl Rodríguez, the Spanish musician who won awards with Son de la Frontera. An impressive return.

ROBIN DENSELOW

TRACK TO TRY *Metal, Madera*

Guillem Moreno

Q&A

Aziza Brahim

How important is music to remind the world of the Sahrawi story? Music is one of the more important ways to spread our culture and the reality our people have been going through for the last 48 years. I hope my music can serve to do this.

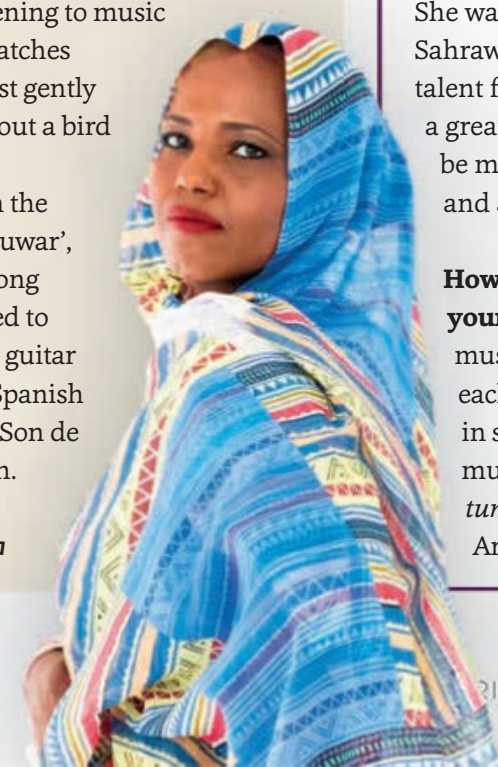
What was it like growing up in those camps in the Sahara? Life always has been very harsh in the refugee camps of Tindouf (Algeria) due to the climate... the scarcity of water, food and other basic things needed to live.

What music did you listen to growing up there? I listened to Sahrawi traditional music, El Haul music from Mauritania (Dimi Mint Abba, Sedoum Abba, Khalifa Ould Eide, or Malouma), *chaabi* music (Dahmane El Harrachi), *rai* music (Cheb Khaled or Cheb Hasni), Arab music from different countries (Warda al-Jazairia from Algeria, Oum Kalthoum or Abdel Halim Hafez from Egypt, the great Fairuz or Majida El Roumi from [Lebanon], George Wassouf from Syria, Sayed Khalifa from Sudan).

I listened to a lot of music on the radio. My grandparents always tuned into Sahrawi and Algerian stations. When I started to tune into foreign stations with my sisters, I got in contact with Western reggae and pop music.

You pay tribute to your grandmother, the poet Ljadra (Al Khadra Mabruk). What influence did she have on you? She was a very important poet for Sahrawi music. She had a special talent for poetic composition and a great charm. She will always be my biggest mentor as a poet and as a person.

How has travelling influenced your music? The popular music and roots music from each place I have lived has in some way influenced my music. There are elements of *tumbao*, flamenco, *rai* and Arab music inside what I do.



Okavango African Orchestra
Migration

Batuki Music

★★★★½

There is something evangelical about the Okavango African Orchestra. Comprising African-born musicians living in Toronto and Montréal, their persuasive fusing of hitherto largely exclusive musical cultures is an attempt to create an '*Africa without borders*.' Aptly named after Botswana's mighty delta – that fertile meeting place on the edge of the Kalahari Desert – their third album *Migration* features at least six languages and gleefully borrows, plunders and collides influences and sounds from across Africa. The admirable naivety of their approach is underlined by seven unambiguously titled tracks that move fluidly from urgent, pleading opener 'Kele Magni (War is Bad)' to the placatory warmth of closer 'Ngaisangane (Let it Unify)'. En route, 'Selam Kiblaki (Choosing Forgiveness)', 'Dukundane (Love One Another)' and 'Kairo (Peace)' serve as telling signposts to the manifesto at work. With lyrics written by different members, the octet claims it was wholly serendipitous that each song had an edifying theme. Either way, its joyful camaraderie and tight but lively way with things is altogether successful, with not a voice out of place or a note that jars. Swirling through the celebratory communal sound alongside the guitars, percussion and vocals can be heard West African *kora* and *djembé*, Ethiopian *krar*, Zimbabwean *mbira* and Senegalese *tama*. A fragrant potpourri indeed.

MICHAEL QUINN

TRACK TO TRY *Kele Magni (War is Bad)*

TOP OF THE WORLD
TRACK 5

Dieuf-Dieul de Thiès
Dieuf-Dieul de Thiès

Buda Musique

★★★★½

After an early run of success, Senegalese eight-piece Dieuf-Dieul de Thiès (Give-Receive) split in 1983, four years into their story. The tale picks up again with a reunion in 2015, two subsequent European tours and now the release of their first studio album, featuring rerecorded classics from their early-80s heyday. It's a sure date for lovers of ebullient West African grooves fuelled by chiming guitars, cross-rhythmic currents, brilliant blasts of brass and a chorale of vocals, coalescing into a swaying, sweating body of music that's reminiscent of the great West African bands – Baobab, Rail, Bembeya, Super Étoile – and energetic enough to bring the dead to life, if only to dance. This self-titled debut set high-kicks into gear from the off, with the band's self-styled '*Afro-Mandingo*' grooves setting the stall on the opener 'Na Bineta', through the multilayered, guitar-driven Senegalese funk of 'Am Sa Waay', to the two live tracks to close, 'Alin Na Djibé' and 'Ndiguële', with the late guitarist Pape Seck and singer Bass Sarr from the original line-up joined by a new generation of players. The set was recorded using vintage, analogue equipment, right down to the mixing desk and tube mics, to capture, contain and release that classic West African sound.

TIM CUMMING

TRACK TO TRY *Ariyo*

Mama Sissoko
Live

Mieruba

★★★½☆

A veteran of Mali's oldest dance orchestra Super Biton de Ségou, Mama Sissoko became the band's guitarist in 1972. When Super Biton broke up in the late 1980s, he forged a solo career before reforming the group in 2001 and taking over as band leader from Amadou Ba. This album was recorded at a 1998 concert in Paris, three years before the reformation, with a backing band featuring veteran Super Biton alumnus Toussaint Sainé as a guest vocalist. The ten live tracks here include songs that would soon appear on Sissoko's second album, *Soleil de Minuit* (1999) plus a nod to his famous history with 'Iri', a Super Biton classic to which his iridescent electric guitar playing lends a deliciously psychedelic twist. There's some wonderful Cuban-influenced African salsa on 'Soleil de Minuit', so good that it's then reprised as the encore to the set. Best of all, though, is 'Boma Ma', a traditional Malian hunter's song turned into a cathedral-sized raise-the-rafters epic with multiple guitars spiralling everywhere, energetically clattering percussion and a soulful, vaulting vocal duet between Sainé and Sissoko.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

TRACK TO TRY *Boma Ma*

Adama Yalomba
Tanou

Remote Records

★★★★½

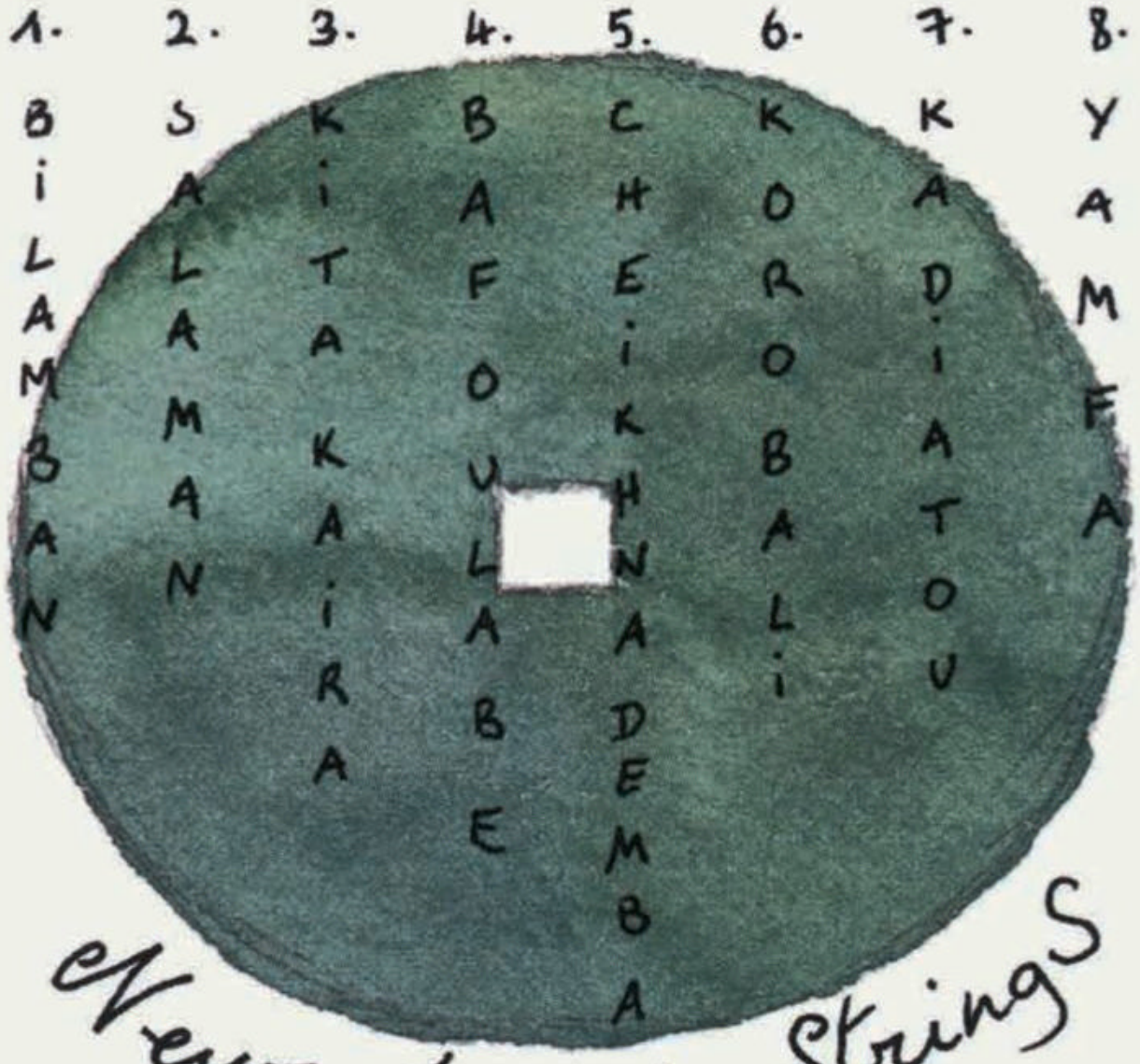
There are few more ancient instruments than Mali's six-stringed, individually bowed *n'dan*, or 'traveller's harp'. Fewer still whose existence is under such serious threat from the dying off of the folk traditions and rituals associated with it, a result of Africa's embrace of globalisation gathering pace. While its 'classical' sibling, the *kora*, is enjoying something of a renaissance, the n'dan seems increasingly reliant on Adama Yalomba to champion it. He puts it through its paces, showcasing its many virtues, in *Tanou*. That the title translates from the Bamanan language as 'gratitude' tells you what you need to know about this celebration of the instrument, of family, friends and heritage. Yalomba's doubling of its strings to 12, adding tuning keys and animal skin over the instrument's half-gourd body to serve as a soundboard is bold and bracing; proving you can super-charge the instrument while still sounding thrillingly authentic. Driven along by Yalomba's vocals and playing, and Sékou Bah and Moïse Sagara's rhythmically adrenalised bass guitar and drums, 'Anbèsé' surges out of the speakers as *Tanou*'s beating heart. Yalomba's younger brother, Madou, sings on the questing 'Akadi Dow Yé' and joins Adama for a warmly lyrical duet, 'Donsokè', which pays tribute to a traditional *donso* hunter and cultural guardian.

MICHAEL QUINN

TRACK TO TRY *Anbèsé*

MEDART

toumani diabate
ballake sissoko



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CD with liner notes from producer Lucy Duran and previously unseen photos

Available 15th March 2024

Chrysalis CATALOGUE

NOUVELLES CORDES ANCIENNES

Daymé Arocena
AlKemi

Brownswood Recordings

★★★★½

Cuban music contributes to, and absorbs, myriad musics from across Latin America, the Caribbean and the US. It has also long been a meeting point for traditions and technical virtuosity, its historic links to Russia also having a strong impact on its culture. Daymé Arocena is a fascinating one-woman embodiment of the competing, conflated influences. Conservatory-schooled, a touring jazz musician and a restless student of her art, she says music is nothing without feeling; *AlKemi*, her first album in five years, is a sublime Afro-Cuban experiment and a declaration of emotional intent. 'Suave y Pegao' quietly and craftily mixes up jazz, *bossa nova* and *urbano* grooves, with reggaeton Rafa Pabön guesting on vocals. Then there's the smouldering neo-soul of 'A Fuego Lento', performed with Dominican singer Vicente García. Torchsong 'Coda (Sade Blues)' has heaps of after-hours sultriness and seductive swing. 'American Boy' is poppy, but political, and percussion-led, and grounded in Arocena's traditions and broad musical education. Since her 2015 debut, *Nueva Era* (a Top of the World in #110), she has moved to Puerto Rico – not quite Cuba but you can almost hear the drums – and enlisted musicians from all over. She has also matured and her material is deeper and more diverse – this is 'feeling' music lifted to the level of religious experience.

CHRIS MOSS

TRACK TO TRY *Coda (Sade Blues)*

TOP OF THE WORLD TRACK 7

La Bottine Souriante
Domino!

Studio B-12

★★★★★

The luminous joy of the dance on the album cover — set at the landmark Van Horne viaduct in Montréal — is audible in this tasty mélange of Québécois folk music and jazz, the latest offering from the award-winning La Bottine Souriante. The energetic 11-person ensemble deploys plucked and bowed string instruments, horns, keyboards, accordion, harmonica and percussion, as well as the impelling *podorythmie* (foot-tapping) of French Canada bolstered by stomps, claps and shouts. And seven of them vocalise, in French and in *turlutte*, the onomatopoeic imitation of fiddle lines. The group continue to source traditional folk tunes as well as the work of more recent Québécois songwriters. But global touring has prompted the import of guest artists and music from elsewhere, represented here by Swedish *nyckelharpist* Erik Rydvall, Italian accordionist Riccardo Tesi and Irish accordionist Sharon Shannon. French Canadian jigs and reels are close cousins to the Irish, and there's much in the way of satisfying instrumental passages between the singing sections. The crafty brass arrangements by tenor saxophonist Jean Fréchette achieve a successful integration with the folk instruments, updating and energising the music without, for the most part, obscuring or compromising the folksiness.

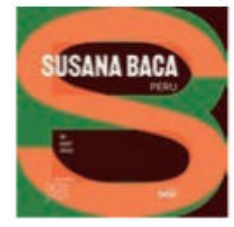
JEFF KALISS

TRACK TO TRY *Les Jolies Québécoises*

Susana Baca
Sesc Jazz: Susana Baca (Ao Vivo)

Selo Sesc

★★★★½



As one of three such releases – along with Ray Lema and jazz flautist Nicole Mitchell's Black Earth Sway – the grande dame of Afro-Peruvian music is captured live at the Sesc Pompeia jazz festival in 2022. Unsurprisingly, it's a cultured set that creates a palpable connection with the audience. Backed by a polished band of acoustic and electric guitar, double bass, percussion, piano or violin and backing vocals, the great singer offers 12 self-penned or adapted numbers, with the opening 'La Herida Oscura', the Argentinean classic 'Milonga de Mis Amores' and the Puerto Rican *salsero* Tite Curet Alonso's 'Sorongo (Congo)' among others taken from *Palabras Urgentes* (a Top of the World selection in #172). There are highlights galore: the way, for example, that Juan Carlos Aliaga del Bosque's violin discretely asserts itself on the opener; the tasteful percussion work on 'Molino Molero'; the dramatic electric guitar solo on 'Cambalache'; the singer's a cappella rendition of 'Yo Vengo a Ofrecer Mi Corazón'; and the way that singer and band interlock so seamlessly on 'Maria Lando'. Susana Baca is in fine voice, her band is exemplary and the mix is spot on: an invaluable record, therefore, of a living legend live in concert.

MARK SAMPSON

TRACK TO TRY *Mario Lando*

Marcel Bonfim
Farewell / Despedida

Shifting Paradigm Records

★★★★½

Immigration is such a hot topic, where the sentiments and creativity of a migrant may be difficult to hear over mean-spirited protests. But it is fascinating: the idea of not really having a home anymore, always being an outsider in your adopted country, and your home country changing until it becomes unrecognisable to you.

Brazilian bassist Marcel Bonfim '*began playing professionally in his hometown of São Paulo a decade and a half ago, before immigrating*' to Chicago, US, in 2015. This, his debut as bandleader, is his way of dealing

Éric Carrière

Natascha Rogers
Onaida

NO FORMAT!

★★★★★

Dutch-born singer and percussionist Natascha Rogers released 'O Baba' as the first single from this album, With its strong Yoruba beats and lyrics it stands out as the chief dancefloor track among a record that is predominantly more airy. It's an album that could potentially be a confusing mess of influences with cringeworthy sentimentality but, due to Rogers' incredible inventiveness and downright beautiful songwriting, it stands out as one of the most interesting and enjoyable albums I've reviewed for this publication in the last 12 years.

Melodically, there are many similarities with the output of Fleet Foxes, with echoes of Nils Frahm in the sparkly piano arrangements and the occasional American folk vocal inflection. There is so much going on on every track: Afro-Cuban hand percussion, jangly electric guitar, little bird sounds; but it never sounds kitchen-sinky and every ingredient sounds appropriate and well blended. 'Aniafa' is an ode to Mother Earth, referencing Rogers' Amerindian heritage, 'Sacred Night' references West African rhythms and on 'Tambor' Rogers switches between Spanish and English to celebrate the power of the drum. It is impossible to pigeon-hole *Onaida* into any particular genre as it takes us on a beguiling journey through many lands and themes.

TOM NEWELL

TRACK TO TRY *Aniafa*

TOP OF THE WORLD
TRACK 4

with this duality, the mixing of samba-esque rhythms of his homeland with American jazz, creating a fine example of jazz samba, a genre defined by Stan Getz and refined by names such as João Donato, but here with a heavy focus on the double bass. The album opens with a medley of two Edu Lobo classics, 'Casa Forte' and 'Zanzibar', based on the northeastern rhythm of *baião*, vocalist Ana Catharina Oliveira duets and duels with Bonfim's stridently plucked bass notes. 'Sister (Irmã)' features '*a 7/4 bass groove*' accompanied by Gerald Martinez' sax while Casey Dahl interjects with his piano solo, and 'Farewell / Despedida', a forlorn piece, demonstrates Bonfim's *saudade* for his homeland.

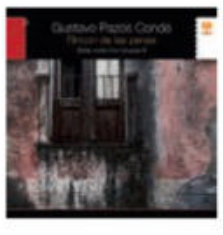
ANDY CUMMING

TRACK TO TRY *Casa Forte / Zanzibar*

Gustavo Pazos Conde
Rincon de las Penas

Saphrane

★★★☆☆



The Río de la Plata has a long tradition of meditative guitar music. It's informed by the *mestizo* traditions of the countryside, by Spain and by a spiritual yearning to mitigate the stresses of the big cities – Buenos Aires and Montevideo. The latter's El Cordón district is where Conde learnt guitar from an old, local teacher who nurtured a transition '*from the classical guitar to the traditional gaucho rhythms of milonga, vidalita and estilo.*' This third album picks up where previous ones left off, combining Conde's own material with pieces by two Argentinian composers in the ECM stable – fellow guitarist Ernesto Snajer and *bandoneón* maestro Dino Saluzzi – and making space for a delicate love song, 'La Partida', a Peruvian *yaraví*; the form is said to be the source of the *triste* and *estilo* genres of Argentina and Uruguay. All 15 songs are quietly intense, perfectly executed and, even where the picking has some pace, the underpinning rhythm is slow, steady; at times the shape and structure suggest a thought-process, like an intuitive alternative to spoken word. Conde teases out sweet-sounding, miniature melodies but what is memorable is the overall tranquillity and a sort of cerebral tenderness.

CHRIS MOSS

TRACK TO TRY *La Partida*

La Dame Blanche
ATÓMICA

Nacional Records

★★★★☆

The international profile of the Cuban-born singer, rapper and musician known as La Dame Blanche has been steadily increasing since she burst onto the scene with a self-titled EP in 2014. Her carefully crafted stage persona – smoking Cohibas, reclaiming porn shop corsets, wielding a flute like a weapon and spitting bars flourished with rolled-R's, while using a sobriquet borrowed from a Celtic goddess and/or a WWI resistance movement – turned heads from the get-go. But despite myriad collaborations with MCs, DJs and producers, including her longtime partner-in-crime, Marc 'Babylotion' Damble, it would be several years before Yaite 'La Dame Blanche' Ramos, the daughter of Buena Vista trombonist Jesús 'Aguaje' Ramos, got her deserved flowers.

Arguably, it was her female-centric fourth album, 2020's *Ella*, that really confirmed her reputation as an artist to be reckoned with. Now comes the explosive *ATÓMICA*, a polished work that bottles all the dynamism of her feted and prolific live shows, weaving elements of hip-hop, trap, reggae and reggaeton into nine fiercely danceable Afro-Cuban tracks variously telling of the strength and beauty of black women ('Mi Negro') and poisoned-apple-eating guardian angels ('Veneno'), a track in which she showcases her remarkable vocal range on the heels of a frantic flute passage. Brazilian actress/musician Amanda Magalhães guests on 'Mata Sede'; Philadelphia shaman DJ Shango lends his remix of 'A La Verita Tuya' bouncy *cumbia*-style insouciance. *Maravilloso*.

JANE CORNWELL

TRACK TO TRY *Mi Negro*

Fabiano Do Nascimento & Sam Gendel
The Room

Real World

★★★★☆

Back in 1964 American saxophonist Stan Getz and Brazilian guitarist João Gilberto released *Getz / Gilberto*, one of the bestselling jazz albums of all time, which helped popularise *bossa nova*. 60 years later, Brazilian guitarist Fabiano Do Nascimento and American saxophonist Sam Gendel have released their own delightful collaboration, which owes a debt to *Getz / Gilberto* and to the music of another Getz collaborator, the Brazilian guitarist Baden Powell.

Recorded in two days, the ten tracks of *The Room* use Indigenous melodies and popular old Brazilian tunes as jumping-off points. The arrangements are even more minimalist than Getz and Gilberto. There's nothing but seven-string guitar and soprano saxophone here – no vocals, no rhythm section. While Gilberto and Getz rejoiced in a delicious languor, Do Nascimento and Gendel are less ▸

Julien Mignot

laid-back. There's an energy, even a sense of agitation, in tracks like the urgent 'Capricho' and in the fluttering harmonics – like a small sonic firework display – on 'Astral Flowers'. Gendel remarkably manages to make his instrument sound as much like a flute as a saxophone, perfectly complimented by Do Nascimento's mellifluous guitar playing.

TONY GILLAM

TRACK TO TRY *Daiana*

Grupo Irakere
Irakere

Mr Bongo

★★★★☆

Grupo Irakere, as the Cuban all-star outfit was known back in 1976 when this second in Mr Bongo's *Cuban Classics* series was originally released, never slotted categorically into either a Latin-jazz or an Afro-Cuban bracket. Trumpeter Arturo Sandoval, featured in typically florid form on one of the two ballads, 'En Nosotros', actually spent a few months in jail during his military service for listening to American jazz on the radio. He tells how the band wanted to play bebop, but were told that their drummer couldn't use cymbals because they sounded too jazzy. To listen to the album's opener, 'Chequeré-Son', is to appreciate how brilliantly they found their own unique fusion. Bebop quotes from Charlie Parker's 'Billie's Bounce' are so heavily disguised by Cuban percussion and intricate, baritone-sax-led horns that dancers wouldn't know, or care. Nominal leader Chucho Valdés is featured on acoustic piano on the other ballad, 'Este Camino Largo', in tandem with Paquito d'Rivera's alto sax, but otherwise the keyboards are electric, lending a (then) contemporary feel redolent of Herbie Hancock and Weather Report. This predominantly upbeat album captures an exuberant band in its early flush of youth, fully justifying the label 'classic'.

MARK SAMPSON

TRACK TO TRY *Chequeré-Son*

Nathalie Joachim
Ki Moun Ou Ye

Nonesuch / New Amsterdam Records

★★★☆☆

Nathalie Joachim, a Juilliard alum and Grammy-nominated classical flautist, undergoes a distinctive musical evolution in her second album, *Ki Moun Ou Ye*. Contrasting with her 2019 debut, *Fanm d'Ayiti*, this record adopts an edgier, more electronic sound, with contemplative and engaged lyrics.

While her first album celebrated Haitian women in music, placing her classical training at the forefront with a lighter feel interspersed with interludes of speech, this time around, she has merged these two worlds into one. *Ki Moun Ou Ye*, which translates as 'Who are You?', incorporates vocal samples directly into the music, Joachim intricately melds her voice with her grandmother's, propelling the album into a transformed musical space, manipulating both voice and instruments with a distinctly modern approach. While the flute still features, its role is now tense and dissonant, evident in tracks like 'Nwa'. Joachim redirects focus to her voice, exploring glitchy synth motifs on 'Kenbe M' akin to Bon Iver's '22 (OVER S∞∞N)', and sampling together vocal recordings of her grandmother in a style reminiscent of Frank Ocean's innovative sampling on *Blonde*.

Diverging from the more easy-listening appeal of her last record as she delves into her personal sonic roots, *Ki Moun Ou Ye* prioritises authenticity, revealing a more introspective and experimental musical journey, portraying a truer expression of Joachim's evolving musical voice.

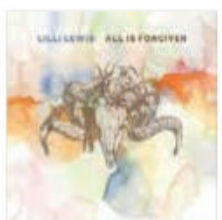
LUCY HALLAM

TRACK TO TRY *Kenbe M*

Lilli Lewis
All is Forgiven

Righteous Babe

★★★★☆



Lilli Lewis has been labelled a 'folk rock diva', but that only describes part of her style. Based in New Orleans, she's a singer-songwriter and pianist whose influences range from gospel, soul and blues through to R&B. She is best categorised under that catch-all term Americana (which happens to be the title of her previous album) and this new set is dominated by thoughtful, personal songs that constantly change musical direction. She starts in rousing style with 'Sin Eater', a grand gospel blues workout on which her piano and fine soulful vocals are matched against Hammond organ, sousaphone from Kirk Joseph of the Dirty Dozen Brass Band, along with a spoken recording by her late grandfather Dr William J Faulkner, a minister and Black American folklorist. Next come rock songs, with the title-track featuring rolling guitar lines worthy of Tom Petty, then followed by a series of slower ballads dominated by Lewis' piano. The stand-out track here is the glorious 'Ciel Éternal', which sounds like a gently exquisite French hymn worthy of the McGarrigle Sisters. Hammond, drums and electric guitars return for the brooding swamp rock of 'Drink this Water Child' and 'Firefly', to end an eclectic set well worth checking out.

ROBIN DENSELOW

TRACK TO TRY *Sin Eater*

Loving
Any Light

Last Gang Records / MNRK

★★☆☆☆

Ranging in stylistic deportment between sweetly braised acoustic rock ('Any Light', 'No Mast'), analgesic stoner rock ('Uncanny Valley'), folky dream pop ('Medicine', 'Blue') and waltzing psychedelia ('On My Way to You'), *Any Light* is a ten-song easy listening trip guided by British Columbia-based multi-instrumentalists/songwriters Jesse Henderson and David Parry, collectively known as Loving. Like Loving's eponymously titled 2016 debut EP and full-length 2020 release, *If I Am Only My Thoughts*, *Any Light* radiates an abundance of diaphanous romanticism and poetic melancholia. As produced by Henderson and Parry and mixed, mastered and engineered by the latter, the new album expands the band's palette by virtue of lusher arrangements featuring trumpet, timpani, vibraphone, strings and organ. Henderson and Parry handle most of the instrumentation, augmented by Evan Cheadle (guitar), Colin Nealis (strings) and Keenan Mittag-Degala (percussion).

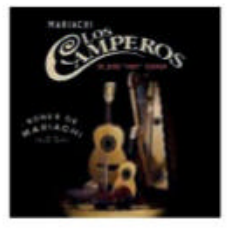
DOUG DELOACH

TRACK TO TRY *Uncanny Valley*

Mariachi Los Comperos
Sones de Mariachi

Smithsonian Folkways

★★★☆☆



Mariachi music, removed from the *mezcal*-sipping, ant-eating *cantinas* of its homeland, still has the power to entertain and surprise. Its energy is infectious, sure, but it's also slightly edgy, even a wee bit insane. Grammy-winning, Carnegie Hall-filling band Mariachi Los Camperos, polished as they are, don't shy from the wildly sweeping strings and on-edge horns that characterise the sound at its best, and on songs like 'El Gusto – The Pleasure' they speed up the beat and turn up the heat to compel even the staidest, soberest *gringo* to tap both feet. *Sones de Mariachi* focuses on the *son*, a fast-paced genre of mariachi music that makes deft use of the guitar section to generate complex rhythms and a bright, colourful timbre. There is remarkable virtuosity, superb vocal work, and rhythmic precision across all 15 songs. The titles remind us of the music's rural roots: 'The Old Bull, 'The Donkey', 'The Little Sparrowhawk'. Mariachi was born to divert and delight, to blast away thoughts of work, poverty and pain. Uplifting as the arrangements are, they don't bury the emotion and the very Mexican quality of underlying sorrow. This is a fabulous introduction to a genre too often relegated to the status of holiday soundtrack or filmic comedy stunt.

CHRIS MOSS

TRACK TO TRY *El Huizache – The Sweet Acacia*

Saramaccan Sound
Where the River Bends is Only the Beginning

Glitterbeat Records

★★★☆☆

This is the 12th volume in ten years in Glitterbeat's *Hidden Musics* series, all recorded by Ian Brennan in his global search for unknown musicians who deserve a wider audience. This time he took his tape recorder into the Amazonian rainforests of Suriname, where he found brothers Dwight Sampie and Robert Jabini, who perform raw, melodic songs on nylon string guitars and sing them in Saramaccan, a Creole language reportedly spoken by little more than 50,000 people of West African descent. Like all of Brennan's productions the field recordings that resulted are captured on-the-fly and it's one of his most captivating projects to date. The tunes of songs such as 'Some Kind of New Beginning', 'Please Save Me' and 'Villages Swallowed by the Floods' (the titles are only given in translation) are gorgeous and sung in wonderfully plaintive cowboy voices without adornment or artifice. Think of some of the 1930s recordings on

Harry Smith's *Anthology of American Folk Music* and you're not far off the spirit of what Brennan has captured here, although he prefers the analogy of Merle Haggard transplanted from Bakersfield to the Amazon. Either way, this is folk music of the most profound and genuine kind.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

TRACK TO TRY *Some Kind of New Beginning*

Brooks Williams
Diamond Days

Red Guitar Blue Music

★★★☆☆

Diamond Days may be his first solo album in four years but Brooks Williams is no slouch. Since 2020's *Work My Claim* he's released two albums with fiddler Aaron Catlow, *Fortune by Design* with banjoist Dan Walsh and a collection of Don Everly songs with late Scottish singer-songwriter Rab Noakes (Noakes' last recording before his death in 2022.)

Originally from Georgia, US, now resident in Cambridge, UK, Williams specialises in nifty acoustic guitar, warm vocals and solid songs, drawing on Americana, country and blues. After so many collaborations, this work is solo as can be – with no backing musicians or fancy effects. Williams gives Dylan's 'Nettie Moore' a dusting down, revealing it to be a surprisingly jaunty folk song. 'On the Island' could almost be a music-hall song – a singalong waltz with thoughtful lyrics while 'Doing Fine' (a line from which gives the album its title) could be an Everly Brothers song. A pleasing album from an indefatigable troubadour.

TONY GILLAM

TRACK TO TRY *Big Sky*

La Yegros
Haz

X-Ray Production

★★★★★

Buenos Aires native Mariana Yegros absorbed from her parents a love of traditional *cumbia* and *chamamé*, a folk music distinctive to north-east Argentina. She studied opera singing before venturing into what has been termed *nu cumbia*, adding elements from African and Indian traditions as well as a healthy dose of electronica to her sound. If that sounds intriguing, I can tell you that *Haz*, the singer's first album in four years, fully lives up to its promise.

Opener 'Bailarin' combines handclaps with shuffling percussion, flowing guitar, soft strings, accordion and pipes, simultaneously bringing to mind West Africa, tango, Latin and European folk. Later tracks add touches of brass, dub and electronic textures. A mezze platter of dishes you wouldn't automatically put together, but which complement each other beautifully. Yegros' strong and supple vocals adapt to each setting. Long-time collaborator Gaby Kerpel has worked wonders with production, while Daniel Martín's compositions effortlessly entice the ear. You never know what's coming next, but every track is unfailingly impressive.

CHRIS WHEATLEY

TRACK TO TRY *Donde (feat Eblis Álvarez)*

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Merengue Típico: Nueva Generación!

Bongo Joe Records

★★★☆☆

These ten vintage 45 rpm rompers, most around three to four minutes long, are from the late 60s and early 70s. Their sound quality is lower than might be expected for the period, the cuts being a touch trebly, lacking bass even on powerful speakers. The ingredients of this Dominican speedfest are accordions, basses, double-headed *tambora* percussion and vocals. Impatient rhythms run rampant, lightning fingers dance over keys, skins and strings, singers hollering with precision phrasing. Small drums clatter boxily, metal scrapes, accordion palpitates, and on 'Caña Brava', by Fefita La Grande (a rare female voice in this genre), there are nimble saxophone licks. Another highlight is 'Por La Mañanita' by Negrito Figueroa with its more angular vocal phrasing. Often the voice styles hail from an earlier period, possessed of quavering vibrato and distortion. There's a great ring to the drums, tonally tuned and reverberantly knocking. The basslines (sounding electric) tend to prowl around at a slower rate. These songs are marvels of accelerated interlocking, creating a party sound of unnerving complexity.

MARTIN LONGLEY

TRACK TO TRY *Caña Brava* by Fefita La Grande

LATIN AMERICA REISSUES
by Mark Sampson

Ary Lobo

Actor Benicio Del Toro described ***Ronroco*** (Nonesuch Records ****) by the Argentinean Academy Award winner, **Gustavo Santaolalla**, as "an album that... just embraces you." Like ideal film music, perhaps. Although Santaolalla went on to write scores for the likes of *21 Grams, The Motorcycle Diaries* and *Brokeback Mountain*, his acclaimed 1998 album – now on vinyl for the first time – was inspired by traditional Argentinean music and not conceived for the cinema. It takes its title from the angular-looking stringed instrument, whose timbre Santaolalla explores in 12 easy pieces, often with the ukulele-like *charango* and/or acoustic guitar, and with whistles, Andean pipes and collaborator Aníbal Kerpel's vibraphone and melodica. 'Iguazú' could complement Ry Cooder's score for *Paris, Texas*, while the repetitious 'Atacama' coruscates like Terry Riley's *A Rainbow in Curved Air*. It's a quietly absorbing, rather remarkable album.

Led by electric guitar, two recent Vampisoul releases, from Peru and from Venezuela, bear a striking resemblance. Recording for Lima's MAG label, **Cuarteto Yemayá** was formed by Cuban-music connoisseur Francisco 'Pancho' Acosta Angeles. His distinctive Japanese-made guitar, often double-tracked, dominates the quartet's second of three albums, 1971's ***El Tic Tac*** (Vampisoul ****). In tandem with electric bass and some dynamic percussion, the fab four achieve on three-minute, no-frills numbers like 'Oye Mi Guitarra' the kind of uplifting, joyful sound reminiscent, in a very different context, of early Kinks. Though they were six, **Príncipe y Su Sexteto** sound on ***Salsa De Guaguancó*** (Vampisoul ***) even more stripped down. Pioneers of the Caracas scene's '*salsa con guitarra eléctrica*,' their 1967 debut is as raw, youthful and unsophisticated as early UK punk – with added percussion.

And so finally to north-east Brazil for some heady *batuque*, *forró* and especially *baião* sounds from ***Ary Lobo – 1958-1966*** (Analog Africa ****), number 19 in the crate-digging specialists' *Limited Dance Editions*. And what a treasure it is. To the basic infectious recipe of accordion, triangle and bass drum, add backing vocals, occasional flute and the warm, ingratiating voice of **Ary Lobo**, described in 1958 as '*the ideal interpreter of northeastern songs*.' The wandering minstrel became a national celebrity until his rockstar lifestyle extinguished the flame, but he left a legacy that this compilation merely sketches. Apart from the final 'Nêgo São', samba jazz in the style of early Sérgio Mendes, the rhythm never changes. Banish any thoughts of monotony, however, wear a big smile and just go with the ebullient flow.

Blanca Altable
Las Formas del Agua
Segell Microscopi

★★★★½

Blanca Altable, a Burgos-born violinist and composer, unveils her talent for conjuring vivid imagery on her second solo album, *Las Formas del Agua*, drawing inspiration from water's transformative essence, which she describes as an '*infinite muse*.' Rooted in her homeland tradition and classically trained, Altable deconstructs Castilian music and encapsulates other fiddle techniques, seamlessly transitioning between rhythmic and emotive styles to post-minimalism and the avant-garde.

With producer Samuel Peñas, Altable explores sonic possibilities by incorporating effects pedals, a loop station and vocals, alongside guest contributions on bass, percussion and keyboards. The outcome is a sort of electro-acoustic post-folk marked by improvisational development and an intuitive approach.

The opening track, 'My Lion, Mamma Lion', blends voice and percussion loops, infusing a danceable African flair. On 'Drops' she collaborates with rapper and poet Alex Hache, whose lyrics, describing a painting of the impressive Burgos Cathedral, assert art's soul-elevating power. Elsewhere, 'Under the Sea' highlights coalescing melodic lines, whereas the first single, 'Inbocacción', resonates with Menhir's ambient electronics. She ventures into neoclassical realms on 'Dew', while her outstanding second single, 'Niño del Invierno', a reflection on motherhood, incorporates layered melodies and vocals, which contribute to the remarkable, diverse texture of the album.

CIRO DE ROSA

TRACK TO TRY *Niño del Invierno*

Martin Carthy
Martin Carthy
Topic Records

★★★★★

This seminal 1965 debut from the godfather of the 60s English folk revival is reissued on vinyl as part of the Topic Treasures series. Among its tracks is most famously 'Scarborough Fair', which inspired a young American singer named Paul Simon to give it a go himself.

But beyond the celebrity name-dropping, these 14 tracks were the beginning of a career that would define English folk to the present day. Classics such as 'Ye Mariners All', 'The Wind that Shakes the Barley' and 'High Germany' are given the pure, acoustic guitar-driven Carthy treatment, while we also hear from among the first recordings of his long-time collaboration with fiddler Dave Swarbrick.

Perhaps the pick of the bunch are album closer 'And a Begging I Will Go' and 'The Barley and the Rye', a short, sweet tale in the long tradition of beautiful wives who take a tumble in the fields with a handsome young man. For all true fans, this is an opportunity to hear this early release afresh in its original vinyl form. For those who missed it first time around, there's no better place to start a voyage into the English folk revival.

NATHANIEL HANDY

TRACK TO TRY *Scarborough Fair*

Matilde Cid
Desassossego
Matilde Cid

★★★★½

Desassossego (Restlessness) is the second album by Matilde Cid, a *fado* singer-songwriter from Estremoz, east of Lisbon. *Puro*, Cid's first album (2019), was nominated for Best Fado Album at the 2020 Portuguese PLAY Music Awards. Fado ballads, with their distinctive soulful passion, have enjoyed broader worldwide popularity in recent years, largely thanks to Portuguese superstar Mariza.

An impressive line-up of musicians join Cid on this album, including guitarists Bernardo Couto, Luís Guerreiro, Bernardo Saldanha and Francisco Gaspar, as well as pianist Manuel Oliveira, violinist Malu Garcia, Argentinian Martín Sued on *bandoneón* and Brazilian singer-songwriter Fred Martins. The pared-down instrumentation gives each of the 13 tunes a deceptively simple tone, never overwhelming Cid's nuanced vocal delivery. From the jaunty 'Porquês (Fado Sem Pernas)', the album builds up in intensity, ending with the hymn-like a cappella 'A Noite'. It feels as if we're being taken on an intimate journey, guided by love: wishful, wistful, hidden or secret. As Cid herself reveals, "I have poured a bit more of myself into it... it's life sung."

So, to follow the pouring analogy, if *Desassossego* were a wine, think lightly carbonated vinho verde, rather than tawny port (maybe more like Mariza, if she'll forgive the metaphor). All in all, an emotionally quenching musical experience.

HUW HENNESSY

TRACK TO TRY *O Fim das Coisas*

Cara Dillon
Coming Home
Charcoal Records

★★★★½

This new release from the Irish singer is more than simply a new album – it's a broad creative response to her ancestry, upbringing in County Derry, nonagenarian mother and raising of three children. The result is an album of her original poetry set to

Carwyn Ellis
Ni A Nhw
Bubblewrap Collective

★★★★½

The unassuming genius that is Carwyn Ellis offers a selection of his wonderful songs and tunes on his album *Ni A Nhw*. Released on Cardiff-based label Bubblewrap Collective, the tracks span a decade, representing his various guises; as Colorama, his collaboration with Bendith, as Rio 18 or as himself. Some tracks will already be familiar to listeners of BBC Radio Cymru, such as 'Ti', and 'Llythr y Glowr'. Others have previously been unavailable to stream, and there are three beautiful covers 'Gorffennaf', 'Hwiangerdd Takeda' and 'Cân am Gariad'.

Ellis is a master of tunes, an accomplished instrumentalist, prolific as a singer, songwriter, collaborator, producer and arranger. 'Ti' is a heartfelt declaration of love, sung in his native Welsh, with complex chord changes that carry you through the song on an immersive journey. Nature is also an obvious muse for Ellis in 'Drudwen' (Starling) and one can imagine blissing out on a beach to the Begin remix of 'Hapus?'. We could all do with a relaxing escape from daily strife now and again, and this collection of songs certainly delivers that. You will be searching for Ellis' back catalogue in no time.

ELLIW IWAN

TRACK TO TRY *Llythr Y Glowr*

TOP OF THE WORLD TRACK 9

Adam Whitmore

music plus a book of the same name collecting those poems with stories and memories from her life.

Working with her long-time collaborator and husband, Sam Lakeman, Dillon has created an atmospheric meditation on place and family, with piano, guitar, cello, violin and synths building the majesty of the spoken word. Sliding between singing and poetry, there's something of Scottish musician Karine Polwart in the delicate observational treatment, and also a hint of The Waterboys' mesmerising take on WB Yeats' poem, 'The Stolen Child'.

A persistent element in Dillon's music is a certain polish and pop commerciality. While this is often a much more stripped-back affair, there are still moments that feel like they could do with a bit more grit. Despite that, this first album of entirely original material is a striking pleasure, principally for Dillon's poetry, with its visceral snapshots of nature and moment.

NATHANIEL HANDY

TRACK TO TRY *Clear the Path*

John McSherry Trio
Féile Live

John McSherry. Francis McIlDuff, Brendán Quinn

★★★☆☆

Having caught attention with their Belfast Féile Trad Trail debut in 2022, the John McSherry Trio's first album confirms the promise offered by that auspicious gig. There was never much of a risk. A master of the *uilleann* pipes and founding member of Lúnasa and transatlantic trad-rock band the olllam, McSherry's choice of partners – fellow virtuoso piper and McPeake family scion Francis McIlduff, and guitarist and vocalist Brendán Quinn – is as good a guarantee of quality as you're likely to get. Add in Dónal O'Connor guesting on keyboards (and doubling as engineer) and the result is an impeccable calling card for the fledgling outfit. Recorded live in O'Connor's Redbox Studios in Belfast over 16 hours, *Féile Live* finds the three in their element. The nine-track set kicks off with 'The Roaring Promenade', a joyous concoction of pipes, guitar, *bodhrán* and gravity-free whistles. Self-penned vocal contributions by Quinn persuasively channel alt-country and folk-rock through folk balladry, 'Homeless' conjuring the conducive spirit of Yusuf / Cat Stevens. 'Liz Rowesome's' is a belting set of reels setting pipes against pipes to rousing effect, 'El Garrotin' is an infectiously playful and tipsy number and the easy-going 'Open Road' deftly frames a new McIlduff tune with two standards. Worth it, too, for the cover of John Fogerty's 'Have You Ever Seen the Rain?'.

MICHAEL QUINN

TRACK TO TRY *Liz Rowesome's*

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Jules Lahana

TOP OF THE WORLD TRACK 2

Giuliano Gabriele
Basta!

Coming MusicArt

★★★★★

Southern Italian trance, anyone? If you've had enough of the same old sounds, try *Basta!* (pun intended). Giuliano Gabriele is a diatonic accordionist and composer from Sora in south-central Italy who works with the hypnotic folk rhythms of the Italian south and blends them with broader global sounds, to great effect. The groove he finds in *Basta!* (Enough!) is truly infectious.

Gabriele draws on *tarantella* and other southern Italian traditions, with their historic links to Greece and Africa. This mix of cultures is reflected in his band, which includes Lucia Cremonesi on Calabrian lyre, Eduardo Vessella on tambourine and Carmine Scialla on *bouzouki* and *chitarra battente* (literally strumming or beating guitar), an instrument similar to a Baroque guitar that is common to the folk music of southern Italy.

To these more traditional instruments are added synths, drums and electric guitars, alongside Gabriele's wired and insistent vocals, creating a high-energy mix. There's a vigour to Gabriele's delivery and an inventiveness to the sound that is really compelling, with a feeling of the very ancient and primordial rubbing up against something young and wild and iconoclastic.

NATHANIEL HANDY

TRACK TO TRY *Basta!*

Erwan Keravec
20 Sonneurs In C

Buda Musique

★★★☆☆

Terry Riley's 'In C' is one of the early landmarks of American minimalism, composed in 1964 and first performed on a selection of wind, brass and keyed percussion instruments like vibraphone and marimba. Over the years it's been played in countless arrangements, including traditional Chinese instruments and, when Africa Express got their hands on it, by Malian instruments including *balafons*, *koras*, guitars, *kamalengoni*, calabash and more. *In C Mali* was a Top of the World album in #107 (April/May 2015).

This new arrangement, by *sonneur* Erwan Keravec, is perhaps one of the strangest, featuring 20 Breton bagpipers, wind players and drummers – a big Breton *bagad*. While it's an arresting sound, the fact that the instruments are of a similar sonority means that the interaction of different textures that makes the original and the Malian versions so interesting doesn't lift off in the same way. There's certainly variety and clashing tones as one goes through the various sections of the piece, 'Parts' 1-9, as different instruments come to the fore but there is always a shrieking bagpipe C. I can imagine it might be quite impressive as a live performance, but as an album it's a brave experiment. There's a performance at the Philharmonie de Paris on June 15.

SIMON BROUGHTON

TRACK TO TRY *Part 1*

Songbook

‘Bushes and Briars’ with Sam Lee

The recorded origins of the English folk song ‘Bushes and Briars’ date back to 1903 when composer Ralph Vaughan Williams had the fortune to meet 74-year-old singer Charles Potiphar, an encounter Vaughan Williams talked about in a 1912 interview for *The Music Student*: *‘I knew and loved the few English folk songs which were then available in printed collections, but I only believed in them vaguely, just as the laymen believes in the facts of astronomy. I was invited to a tea-party given to the old people of a village in Essex, only 20 miles from London; after tea we asked if any of them knew any of the old songs, whereupon an old man, a shepherd, began to sing a song which set all my doubts about folk song at rest. The song which he sang was ‘Bushes and Briars’.’* Vaughan Williams, along with Lucy Broadwood, returned to Essex in 1904 to record a rendition of the song, purportedly by Ann Humphreys though research since believes it could have been Broadwood or another singer entirely. Either way, the song would find its way into print in 1908, with Vaughan Williams taking the lyrics from broadside ballads and renditions he had heard.

However, it could be said that the moment the song really had its moment was when a version of it by folk singer and collector Isla Cameron, a close friend of Ewan MacColl, found its way into John Schlesinger’s 1967 film *Far from the Madding Crowd*, with Cameron’s voice dubbed on to Julie Christie. Here, the song’s message of heartbreak really hit home: *‘Sometime I think I’ll go to my love / And tell to him my mind / But if I should go to love / My love he will say, ‘Nay’,’* sings Cameron, who said that she learnt the song from *‘an old country woman from Ingatestone [Essex],’* according to folk singer Jean Ritchie, who recorded her performance in 1960.

Other versions have since come from June Tabor, Magpie Lane, Serious Sam Barrett and Eliza Carthy & Nancy Kerr, while it must be noted that Sandy Denny’s ‘Bushes and Briars’ is a completely different song.

Not that Sam Lee was listening to any of these versions. He has included an interpretation of the song on his latest album, *songdreaming*. “I don’t remember first hearing it,” he recalls. “I certainly didn’t hear it recorded. I was aware of the Vaughan Williams settings but there were no versions by contemporary folk singers that inspired or even prompted me in fact.” For Lee, he wanted to start afresh with his version.

“It was really a song that is not about listening to other people’s interpretations but about stripping back, almost like razing to the ground what that song was, like one would with bushes and briars: you cut back and then you allow a new growth, a more prolific and a more verdant new growth to come back, and that’s my philosophy a lot of the time with folk music.”

Whereas those early versions cast it as a love story, Lee wanted to give it a wider viewpoint, taking the title, at least, literally. “I spend a lot of my time in bushes and briars, seven weeks sitting for several hours listening to nightingales – and suddenly there was a resonance with that relationship I have with the bird. I thought ‘how does one take that context of an old folk love song, a broken-hearted song, and transfer it to something more ‘worldview’, looking at not just an individual but a species, and a whole ecosystem? What does it mean for that sense of abandonment, as well as what does it mean for a sense of loss, and also a pining for something, a love affair that is going to end?’ So, for me it was drilling into the core emotion of ‘Bushes and Briars’. ‘What was it activating in the hearts of previous singers, that specific quality of feeling, and how does one expand that on to an ecological level through poetry, honouring essences of that song, and some of the lyrical suggestions but replacing them and recontextualising them to have a sense of emotions of solastalgia, of eco-anxiety, of apocalyptic thinking?’”

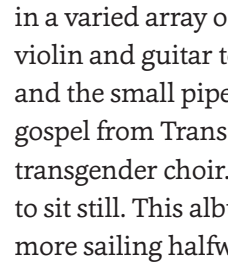
“It’s dark,” he says, beginning to smirk, “that idea of watching the world burn is as bad as being dumped by your lover. Do you know what I mean? I’m sure there are better ways to say that, but we only have a limited range of emotions as humans, and the micro and the macro can be very contiguous, or equal in proportion, but at the moment we’re dealing with proportions that our species have never quite appreciated, perhaps not since biblical times.” *RUSS SLATER JOHNSON*

+ **Sam Lee**’*s interpretation of ‘Bushes and Briars’ is on this issue’s compilation, track 11*

Sam Lee
songdreaming

Cooking Vinyl

★★★★½



For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. In the face of technological advance, we have seen an equal and opposite surge in communion with the natural world. This revival has certain figureheads, among them English folk song renaissance man, Sam Lee.

He returns with his first studio album in four years, following 2020’s *Old Wow*, and the man behind London’s Nest Collective and the *Singing with Nightingales* country walking and music phenomenon once more delivers a manifesto for harmony with our environment. Produced by Bernard Butler and with *‘long-time collaborator James Keay,’* birdsong is never far from the fore, field recordings rippling into view on the opener.

The textures of nature are echoed in a varied array of instruments from violin and guitar to *qanun*, *nyckelharpa* and the small pipes. There’s also gospel from Trans Voices, a London transgender choir. Lee is never one to sit still. This album finds him once more sailing halfway between the dark soil of the real countryside and a swirling dreamscape of myth and legend, with music and song that is arch, unashamedly particular and highly distinctive. A folk voice for the England of the 21st century.

NATHANIEL HANDY

TRACK TO TRY *Aye Walking Oh*

Little North
While You Wait

ACT

★★★★½

While You Wait is Little North’s sixth album and the trio seem unstoppable as they continue to cement their place as Scandinavian jazz stalwarts. Pianist Benjamin Nørholm Jacobsen, bassist Martin Brunbjerg Rasmussen and drummer Lasse Jacobsen this time invite Norwegian trumpeter Oscar Andreas Haug to join them on their journey of presenting cinematic, enchanting and wistful narratives of sound.

‘Le Guin’ introduces speculative realms, resonating with the novelist’s spirit. ‘Third Eye’ showcases the band’s versatile musicianship, while

Dominick Tyler

'Colors' soothes the meditative soul with a cloud and sky-inspired essence. The title-track unfolds like a relaxed yet apprehensive railway platform conversation between strangers (trumpet and bass) with familiar friends joining (drum and piano). 'Little One' exudes a Sunday ambiance, while 'Steinar' is more like gentle waves washing pebbles on a shoreline. 'Terrible Seeds' is dismissive in its approach with the trumpet providing vocal-like support. The album concludes with 'Embrace', which suggests a curiosity and willingness for connection.

It is an album that grabs your attention from start to finish and will encourage you to explore the trio's back catalogue.

BUZZ BURY

TRACK TO TRY *Third Eye*

Almir Mešković & Daniel Lazar
Family Beyond Blood

Alda Records

★★★★½

Accordionist Almir Mešković was born in Bosnia and violinist Daniel Lazar in Serbia; both grew up steeped in Balkan folk music. They met in Norway at the Norwegian Academy of Music in Oslo. Their collaboration reflects not only the music of their homelands, but that of the country in which they met, where accordions and violins are part of a rich folk tradition. The musicians they met in Norway also reflect wide-ranging vocal styles and diverse cultures, hence the album's title. So among their guest musicians, there's the warmth of Malian *kora* (including Toumani Diabaté), Sámi and Iranian vocal techniques and traditions, and Norway's own tuba star Daniel Herskedal.

But it's Mešković and Lazar's playing which are the beating heart of the release, soulful yet elegant, accordion and violin at their very best, as on the opening 'Valse Norvegienne', but they are not afraid to hurl themselves into the breathtaking virtuosity of Balkan dance either ('Capriccio Balkanico'). 'Yearn' and 'Calusul Oltenesc' reveal the strength of this collaboration capable of deep emotion and overflowing joy, and exquisite playing. A duo to watch and delight in.

FIONA TALKINGTON

TRACK TO TRY *Calusul Oltenesc*

Northern Resonance
Vision of Three

Trad Records

★★★★½

In 2017 Swedish *viola d'amore* player Anna Ekborg Hans-Ers started to realise her dream of establishing a string trio grounded in Scandinavian folk music but including the previously untested combination of Hardanger fiddle and *nyckelharpa*. When she took the idea to Hardanger fiddle player Jerker Hans-Ers and nyckelharpa player Petrus Dillner, Northern Resonance was born, with their first, self-titled album award-nominated in Sweden just a couple of years later. More recently, with international live success at the likes of Folk Alliance International (celebrated in *Vision of Three* with the track 'Kansas City') under their belts and the release of this crucial album looming, they proved one of the undisputed showcase hits of the recent Manchester Folk Festival/English Folk Expo 2023. "There was something more traditional about the first record; recorded live, no overdubs, a very acoustic record," Anna explains. "This record is more produced, as if it were a pop record. We took more time in the studio and really found out how to get the best out of these instruments and the band." In the process, Northern Resonance have crafted something genuinely exciting in *Vision of Three*, resonant with the joy of creating and playing music together with the confidence to push the boundaries of what Nordic folk music can be.

KEVIN BOURKE

TRACK TO TRY *No 1*

Opez
Social Limbo

Agogo Records

★★★½☆

This is the second album from Opez, led by guitarist Massi Amadori, and one which continues their exploration into melancholic nostalgia. We open into the soundworld of cheesy Italian pop from the 1950s and 60s, the influence of which is to the fore on tracks such as 'Umbra' and 'Venezia'. The album begins to come to life with 'Social Roll' and 'Mossa Nova', which, as the latter title suggests, have a Latin beat, and 'Limbo', which is rather sweet and has a birdsong introduction. However, the tempo drops again, and we are back with the Morricone-like guitar lines that sound as though they come straight out of the Cinecittà of the 1970s. It is hard to hear Amadori's imagined fluidity of being '*female, sensitive, sexy*' in any of this, nor the urgency of '*social raids*' and contrast of '*dark and light*,' all of which are claimed by the notes, but seem to be window dressing over relatively straightforward music-making. None of this is ground-breaking, but if you are looking for some evocative easy listening then this might be for you.

MARIA LORD

TRACK TO TRY *Mossa Nova*

LINA_
Fado Camões

Galileo Music

★★★★★

The artist known as LINA_ is a *fado* singer with an exquisite voice and a love of experimentation. She won a batch of awards for *Lina_Raül Refree*, in which she was backed only by the Spanish producer's minimalist electronica, and for her latest album, based on the work of the celebrated 16th-century Portuguese poet Luís Vaz de Camões, she has turned to Justin Adams. He may have worked with everyone from Tinariwen to Souad Massi, but has never tackled fado before, and the result is an intriguing fusion that balances tradition and experiment with LINA_'s thrilling, passionate voice matched against subtle, bravely original backing. Pedro Viana is on Portuguese guitar, John Bagott (ex-Portishead, Massive Attack and Robert Plant) adds piano, Fender Rhodes, drum programming and Moog bass, while Adams himself plays guitar, percussion and programming to bring the songs a gently thrilling, unexpected edge. So the opening 'Desamor' sets LINA_'s emotional, powerful singing against thoughtful piano and guitar work, on 'Amor é um Fogo Que Arde Sem se Ver' her pained vocals are matched against minimalist guitar lines, gentle electronica, and passages of silence. And on 'Pois Meus Olhos Não Cansam de Chorar' she is backed by edgy rumbling effects and delicate piano lines. Experimental fado at its finest.

ROBIN DENSELOW

TRACK TO TRY *Amor é um Fogo Que Arde Sem se Ver*

TOP OF THE WORLD TRACK 6

Luís Mileu

NORDIC *by Fiona Talkington*

Eva Väljaots & Robbie Sherratt

Eva Väljaots & Robbie Sherratt describe themselves as an '*Anglo-Estonian folk duo*,' but that simply doesn't describe what they have produced on their debut album ***Skylark*** (Eva Väljaots & Robbie Sherratt ****). They have brought together different traditions and sounds and created something new out of wistful Estonian melodies and dance rhythms, and gorgeous *kannel* (zither) playing from Väljaots, with Sherratt's earthy voice and fiddle showing how much he inhabits both the solidness and wit of English ballads and dances. There is deep listening here and truly magical sounds, delighting in the voices of nature. This is collaboration at its best.

It's good to hear church and pipe organs back in favour. Finnish band **Ikiranka** is a sublime meeting point for three musicians on bass clarinet, electronics and found-sounds, and organ. Each brings their own personality in the adventurous ***Sydänmaa*** (Kuu Records ***). Their music is rooted in folk, laced with earthy and elegant electronics along with sounds from the lake, and even radio mast support cables. Add to that the exquisite bass clarinet playing of Joakim Berghäll and the overall effect is hypnotising and utterly compelling.

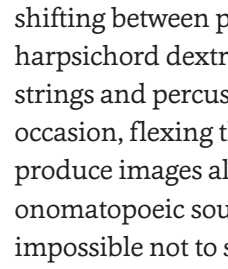
Also compelling are Norwegian folk-synth microtonal music-making duo **Naaljos Ljom**. Their second release ***Naaljos Ljom 2*** (Motvind ***) comes with an even greater confidence than their first in pushing boundaries, drawing on some of Norway's great folk historians and some of the legendary folk musicians. The album even opens with words from a Norwegian radio archive which sounds like music in itself. The melodies are here, breathing new life, inviting the listener to, maybe, be part of some warehouse-in-a-forest installation. Try the 'Halling Etter Jørn Hilme' for example where the blacksmith's hammer meets the church bells and the high-kicking dancers have added a new twist to Norway's folk archive.

When new chapters of Norwegian folk history are written, **Sigrid Moldestad**'s name will be there in shining lights. ***Breim*** (Heilo ****), named after her birthplace, is a tribute to her roots and her cultural heritage featuring 26 tracks, fiddle, Hardanger fiddle and some songs, in homage to many of the legendary folk musicians whose tunes have inspired her over the years. Typically modest, she says that it has taken time to show herself as a '*tradition bearer*' but for those of us who have followed her outstanding musicianship as a performer and communicator over the years, her honesty and musical beauty have always been there. *Breim*, with its accompanying books and pictures, is something to cherish.

Orchestra of the Swan
Earthcycle

Signum Classics

★★★★½



This third 'mixtape album' from Orchestra of the Swan continues the classical ensemble's adventures into bending and breaking genre boundaries. *Earthcycle*'s predecessors nudged the top of the US Billboard chart and quickly gained traction on streaming services. Spliced together here are traditional folk songs, jazz influences and one of classical music's most familiar masterpieces, Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*. Despite its antiquity – it was composed in 1723 – it provides an apt spine for a programme preoccupied by current environmental issues. In David Gordon's lithe, gently jazz-laced arrangement, the Baroque juggernaut is a thing of wonder and vitality, the orchestra's David Le Page a fizzing violin lead, with Gordon shifting between piano and harpsichord dextrously. Ensemble strings and percussion also rise to the occasion, flexing their muscle to produce images alive with onomatopoeic sounds of nature. It's impossible not to shiver during Gordon's duet with Le Page on his own 'Feeling the Chill'. Former BBC Radio 2 Folk Awards-winner Jackie Oates adds English pastoralism to the equation, rustic and robust on 'Bright Phoebus', buoyant and spry on 'The Lark in the Morning', exquisitely poetic on the affecting 'The Robin's Petition'. Disparate though the various elements are, they are perfectly integrated. Superb recorded sound repays listening on headphones with ravishing detail. The curious won't be disappointed.

MICHAEL QUINN

TRACK TO TRY *The Robin's Petition*

Katherine Priddy
The Pendulum Swing

Cooking Vinyl

★★★★★

Katherine Priddy's sophomore set is an intimate, emotive, interconnected album of tableaux that encompasses the past, and past loves, and family and the future – the pendulum swing of the title – each acutely, sensitively observed from the roving centre of a nomadic musician's perspective.

There are emotive meditations on family ('Walnut Shell' is for her twin

Ruudu Rahumaru

brother, while 'Father of Two' is a song to make her dad cry and 'First House on the Left' evokes a family home through a deeper sense of time); on relationships and break-up ('These Words of Mine', 'Does She Hold You Like I Did', 'Anyway, Always' and album highlight 'Ready to Go') and desire, whether for a lover on 'Northern Sunrise', or a particular kind of domestic bliss on 'A Boat on the River'. They are beautifully written, sung and played, with a dazzling poetic deftness and concision embedded in Priddy's strong melodies and close-to-the-ear vocals. '*I weave tapestries from similes, sew my words like flower seeds,*' she sings on 'These Words of Mine', and this is a set bestrewn with brilliant blooms, climbing out of the shade, into the light, each of them touching the heart and firing the mind. It's sure to be one of the albums of 2024.

TIM CUMMING

TRACK TO TRY *Ready to Go*

The Schmoozenbergs
Mouse

Schmusic

★★★☆☆

The Schmoozenbergs may sound like a novelty band, but they are a quartet of classy musicians who clearly like to have fun. Based in Bristol, and becoming increasingly well-known for their appearances in clubs, halls and festivals, they play slick, tight and (mostly) high energy instrumental pieces, many of them influenced by Django Reinhardt, Stéphane Grappelli and the Paris jazz scene, with gypsy swing mixed in with East European klezmer. The band has two guitarists, Stan Stennett and Tom Brydon-Smith, who started out working as a duo before being joined by Ron Phelan on double bass and then Gina Griffin, whose violin dominates many of their self-written instrumentals. They are special simply because they are very good at what they do, mixing impressive playing with contagious enthusiasm. This is their third album, and it demonstrates both the interplay between the band members and their ability to branch out. The set may be dominated by their up-tempo gypsy jazz/klezmer signature style (as on the delightful title-track), but they switch direction for the slinky and then sturdy 'Tango 20', on which they constantly change pace, or the slower, atmospheric 'Acceptance'. I suspect they are even more fun playing live.

ROBIN DENSELOW

TRACK TO TRY *Mouse*

Fatima Szalay

Thanos Stavridis & Stella Tempreli
Ciel: Tales from the Box

Artway Productions

★★★☆☆

Tales from the Box is a collaboration between accordionist Thanos Stavridis and cellist Stella Tempreli. This debut from the duo takes the title of *Ciel* ('blue' or 'sky' in French) and is a pan-Mediterranean instrumental journey spanning influences from their native Greece all the way to Portugal.

Stavridis is a veteran of the Greek and Balkan music scene, a founder member of Northern Partners, Cabaret Balkan and Drom. Tempreli is a graduate of Thessaloniki's University of Macedonia's cello programme and brings a certain classical grace to the performances. On certain tracks, the duo is also accompanied by Dimitris Angelakis and Dimitris Zacharakis on vibraphone, Yiannis Papatriantafyllou and Giotis Kiourtsoglou on bass, Nikos Vargiamidis and Dimitris Klonis on drums and Angelos Polychronou and Christos Tassios on percussion.

While the tempo occasionally lifts into a waltz or a *bossa*, in general the atmosphere is as serene and languid as the Mediterranean environment they have set out to depict in musical form. The result – largely composed by Stavridis, with a JS Bach composition to close – is almost stately, highly refined and delicately palatable. This is maybe not a Mediterranean of sweat and wildfires, but it is certainly a Mediterranean of blue skies and endless sunsets.

NATHANIEL HANDY

TRACK TO TRY *Amischa*

Fatima Szalay
Amor Fati

FolkEurópa

★★★★☆

Fatima Szalay is a young Hungarian singer who trained at the Liszt Academy in Budapest and this is her debut album featuring excellent performances of (mainly) traditional songs. She has a natural, unforced voice which suits the repertoire very well. Aged 18, she went with her teacher Éva Fábián to Transylvania to hear some of the traditional singers and she's returned many times since. Many of the songs are from different parts of Transylvania and they're recorded with a fine group of musicians, particularly the fiddler Pál Danhauser. They sound excellent on 'Te Nyavalyás' (You Scumbag) from the village of Palatka.

The name Fatima isn't common in Hungary and comes from the fact that she was adopted and is half-Hungarian half-Afghan. This mix has led her to pick bilingual songs – in Hungarian and Romanian, Hungarian and Romani, Hungarian and Croatian. There are also Turkish songs with lute and clarinet. Rather different is 'Psyché Dala' (Song of Psyché), setting Hungarian lyrics to the tune we know as 'Greensleeves' and a more Balkan sounding irregular 7/8 melody. A refreshing new voice on the scene.

SIMON BROUGHTON

TRACK TO TRY *Te Nyavalyás – Palatka*

Toc de Crida
Toc de Crida

Microscopi

★★★☆☆

Every musician that picks up on tradition sooner or later must decide whether they try to stay true to an idealised impression of the past or figure out how to claim a contemporary approach to it without severing ties. Spanish band Toc de Crida's modern take on *colla de xeremiers*, a cultural ex-libris of the Mallorca region, does not take a radical stance, resorting to its usual melodies and instruments – *xeremiers* (a sort of bagpipe), *flabiol* (flute) and *tambori* (drum) – while fusing them with elements from different geographies and sprinkles from tasteful electric bass and guitar.

So the basis for *Toc de Crida* is the party music commanded by xeremiers, flabiol and tambori, shaping itself as a charming, danceable medieval set of tunes, designed to entertain popular balls. But with every other song, one starts noticing these little twists that Toc de Crida add to the songs, readjusting their flavour: 'Vals d'Aigua' is a happy waltz with a bit of a rock swing to it, 'Pep Pinxo' has a hint of 'The March King' John Philip Sousa, but then breaks into a sort of Arabic tango. 'Pebre Coent, Pebre Calent' has a European traditional dance flair but crosses genres to an unexpected land where we could find The Clash teaming up with Brazilian *choro* master Pixinguinha.

While there is hardly a revolution to be found here, *Toc de Crida* makes for compelling listening and is sure to be a live triumph.

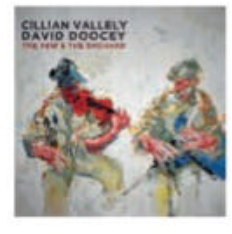
GONCALO FROTA

TRACK TO TRY *Pebre Coent, Pebre Calent*

Cillian Vallely & David Doocey
The Yew & The Orchard

Cillian Vallely

★★★★☆



The long tradition of music flowing between the east and west of Ireland's northern counties is nimbly caught in *The Yew & The Orchard* with Cillian Vallely's *uilleann* pipes and David Doocey's fiddle finding a shared voice on common ground. Where 'The Yew' references Doocey's native County Mayo, 'The Orchard' alludes to ▸

Vallely's native County Armagh. Between and betwixt the two lies fertile musical soil, one nimbly turned here in tunes old and new. Evident from the off is both men's mastery, lightly worn, almost casually displayed, of their instruments. There's fierce technique at play here, Doocey and Vallely singing from the same hymn sheet with a delicacy and dexterity that delights and occasionally dazzles. It's especially felt in the seamless meshing together of traditional and original material, the segues from one to the other and back again lifted by virtuoso playing. It all breathes new life and fresh, ear-opening combinations into the familiar fiddle-and-pipes pairing that is as ancient as the instruments themselves. Reels are dispatched with flowing, animated fervour, airs with becoming emotion. Seán Óg Graham's guitar, Valley's piano and Doocey's guitar add discrete but telling support.

MICHAEL QUINN

TRACK TO TRY *Big Pat's / Scotch Mary / Oot Be Est Da Vong*

Jan Van Angelopoulos & Fotis Siotas
BKXS

Mr Vertigo

★★★☆☆

This is one of the more adventurous albums I've come across recently, and one which is based on arguably one of the most adventurous dramas to come out of Classical Greece, *The Bacchae* by Euripides. The play is literally Dionysian and the music has some of that wildness to its character. While Angelopoulos – on drums and electronics – and Siotas – on violin – claim that the tracks derive from Greek folk traditions, this is hard to hear (much of the influence seems to lie in the rhythms, try 'Agavi' or 'Choro'). A lot of it is hard driven and the drums are very much to the fore. This is not an album you are going to be relaxing to; but then this is in line with the nature of the drama it describes. The match between the play/characters and the track titles (e.g. 'Tiresias') is not entirely clear and given the rather uniform nature of the tracks, the distinction between them is lost. Mention should, however, be made of the beautiful narration (in modern Greek) on some tracks by Achilleas Kyriakidis, Matina Pergioudaki and Ektoras Liatsos, I could listen to their voices all day.

MARIA LORD

TRACK TO TRY *Choro*

BRITISH & IRISH FOLK *by Kevin Bourke*

Project Smok

Middlesbrough's **Amelia Coburn**, who has benefitted from the admirable English Folk Expo Artist Mentoring Scheme, has released her first full-length, ***Between the Moon and the Milkman*** (Hanglands ***). Produced by Bill Ryder-Jones, it's an impressive and elegant showcase for her distinctive voice and already accomplished and observant songwriting. Like many debuts, it can sound a bit scattershot in its eagerness to show off the artist's facility with different genres but I'm confident we'll all be hearing a lot more from Coburn in the future.

Following the release of a solo album, *Banjaxed,* in 2019 for Scottish-based tenor banjo player Ciarán Ryan, ***Occupational Hazards*** (Ciarán Ryan Music ***) appears under the guise of the **Ciarán Ryan Band** and features his live band members – Donald Hay on drums, Bev Morris on bass, Chris Waite on rhythm guitar and Andrew Waite on accordion and keys – alongside Ryan, who's fairly blazing away on tenor banjo and lead electric guitar. It's an impressively high energy affair with a lot of rock and the odd splash of prog bolstering its Irish trad roots, so could work especially well as a memento of a sweaty live gig.

As well as Ryan's album, the hard-working Duncan Lyall also produces and guests on ***The Outset*** (Project Smok ***), the second album from Glasgow-based neo-trad trio **Project Smok**. Featuring the formidable talents of Ali Levack (whistle and pipes), Ewan Baird (*bodhràn*) and Pablo Lafuente (guitar), it fearlessly expands on their genre-bending style, with new-age pop and electronic inflections to their lively and intricate compositions.

Scottish fiddle-playing quartet **RANT**, comprising Bethany Reid from Shetland, Anna Massie and Lauren MacColl from the Highland peninsula of the Black Isle and Gillian Frame from Arran, celebrate their first decade of collaboration with ***Spin*** (Make Believe Records ***), paying tribute to, but determinedly putting their own 'spin' on, bands and musicians from across the globe that '*influenced the quartet's formative years*,' including Capercaillie ('Dr MacPhail's Reel'), Solas ('Big Reel of Ballynacally'), Michael McGoldrick ('James Brown's March') and Aly Bain ('Hangman's Reel').

Doyle & Andersson's ***New Ground*** (Doyle & Andersson ***) finds the Irish singer Colm Doyle and the award-winning Swedish-born harmonica player Joel Andersson exploring their own unique and spirited take on Irish traditional music. It's produced by Colm's well-respected brother John and all the Doyle brothers guest on a stirring version of saucy Child Ballad 'The Baffled Knight'.

Two Halves (Richard Trethewey ***) from Cornish story-singer, musicologist and music therapist **Richard Trethewey**, was first imagined for vinyl with one side of songs and music inspired by stories from Cornwall's '*evocative river estuaries*' while we are told that '*the second half is more akin to his 2012 debut album Dig Where You Stand and tells stories associated with Cornwall's industrial heritage*,' including some drawn from his own family's history, with some welcome humour and no little dignity.

Middle East REVIEWS

Shay Hazan
Wusul
Batov Records

★★★½☆

With his debut solo album, 2021's *Reclusive Rituals*, Tel Aviv-based bassist and composer Shay Hazan revealed a simple idea: harnessing the natural groove of the *gimbri* to form the louche foundation of laid-back rhythmic workouts that borrowed freely from Gnawa, hip-hop, Afrobeat, dub and nu-jazz. He must have enjoyed the plaudits he received because, for his follow-up, he's made pretty much the same record again.

While the debut was constructed during COVID lockdown, this latest offering features tracks worked out during live performance, brought to life by members of Hazan's live band. Tenor saxophonist Eyal Netzer and trumpeter Roy Zuzovsky add some neat horn charts but, to these ears, the album suffers from overly-polished production with the rough edges sandblasted out of existence. It sounds like the background ambience to an afternoon drinking beverages adorned by umbrellas in some exclusive beach bar.

Hazan's grasp of the gimbri is somewhat rudimentary, usually just employing it to provide basic and mercilessly chilled-out basslines for plodding, beat-heavy vamps. The most intriguing moment comes on the elegiac, beatless 'Yarabi', with a wistful guitar figure setting the stage for a gently lyrical gimbri solo. There's more to life than drum breaks, you know.

DANIEL SPICER

TRACK TO TRY *Yarabi*

HJirok
Hjirok
Altin Village & Mine

★★★★½

HJirok is a collaboration between Iranian-Kurdish singer Hani Mojtahedy and producer Andi Toma from the German IDM (intelligent dance music) duo Mouse On Mars. Mojtahedy's Persian and Kurdish classical singing techniques are mixed with Sufi percussion rhythms, snippets from regional melodic instruments and sounds collected during travels through the Iraqi part of Kurdistan. The opening track 'Sanandaj' (named after the city Hani Mojtahedy grew up in in North-West Iran, a capital of Iranian-Kurdish Sufism) starts with spellbinding vocals but then transforms into heavy percussive trance music. The third track on *Hjirok*, 'Yahu', is sung over Persian *tombak* drums in a complex irregular metre, first with electronic sound effects and later a Persian *setar* lute. In 'Jin Bo Chie', sounds like the drums and *ney* flute of the Egyptian *moulid* Sufi ritual accompany Mojtahedy's vocal melismas. 'Meselek' evokes a musical road trip through the region, with scattered sounds as if coming from a radio in a passing car, a voice inside the car reciting a story, and stopovers taking place in villages to attend spiritual gatherings.

Kurdish culture, Sufism and womanhood are under duress in the region, certainly in Iran, so maybe it is not for nothing that the opening track is named 'Sanandaj' and the final track 'Tehran' (where HJirok for the moment could never perform).

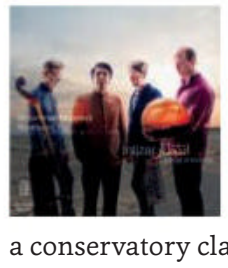
Like on Naujawanan Baidar's *Khedmat Be Khalq*, which I reviewed before, a distinctive genre of folk-IDM seems to be evolving in the region; Egypt's Maurice Louca, Morocco's Remix Culture and Syria's Hello Psychaleppo are other harbingers.

NEIL VAN DER LINDEN

TRACK TO TRY *Yahu*

Mohammad Motamedi & Rembrandt Trio
Intizar
Just Listen Records

★★★★★



When I visited the national Fajr Music Festival in Tehran for the first time, I walked into a performance by a conservatory class, with a fantastic singer. Given the fact that I attended by chance, I assumed that this – high – level, must be the average norm among music students. But no, although the general quality *is* high, the singer, Mohammad Motamedi, turned out to be an exception.

The pieces are partly Motamedi and the trio's own compositions, based on classical Iranian musical forms, and partly arrangements of classical Iranian songs. The lyrics come from freethinkers of classical Iranian poetry, Saadi, Hafez and Omar Khayyam. There's also Araf Azvini's pacifist poem about a soldier confronted with the death of a comrade in 'Az Khoune Javanan'; here the combination of Motamedi's voice and Rembrandt Frerichs' playing of the church organ is chilling. Instrumentally, the album was recorded in a former church that is now an organ museum, and some of the instruments of the museum were utilised. The longest piece, 'In the Middle of the Garden', starts with Frerichs playing a Walter fortepiano from 1790, now re-tuned to a Persian scale, thus coming close to the sound of the Persian *santur*. The entire ensemble gyrates to a mesmerising climax, and Motamedi's vocal whirls into evermore ecstatic highs, with a somewhat *Bitches Brew* and Grateful Dead drive. Motamedi is a master in *tahrir*, the classical yodelling technique, and he uses it extensively throughout the 15-minute+ track.

Intizar means longing. Titled in this way, the album symbolises the hope for a new era, most likely directed at Iran.

NEIL VAN DER LINDEN

TRACK TO TRY *In the Middle of the Garden*

Mitra Sumara
Dream
Persian Cardinal Recordings

★★★½☆

US-based bandleader of Mitra Sumara, Yvette Massoudi, covers 60s and 70s Iranian pop. Notably she pays tribute to the popular female pop singers Ramesh and Googoosh, and the more Persian traditions of Pari Zangeneh. She turns some of the former two's most danceable songs, and a ballad by Zanganeh, into electropop tracks, which are now popular at the New York-based Disco Tehran organisation, who organise Iranian music and dance events.

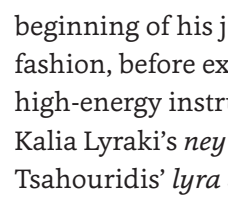
The music emulates how an Iranian/Persian pre-1979 revolution progressive funk-pop band may have sounded. Joyous remakes for carefree dancing, as well as a moment of nostalgic longing, while dreaming about better times for the nation. Massoudi's voice stands out. However, the accompaniments are somewhat monotonous in atmosphere. For instance, the trombones and drums generate brassy funk effects, but also somewhat lead to uniformity. One or two tracks with a different ambience would have been welcome. But it is great to hear 'Talagh' in this treatment, a cover of the legendary Googoosh song of the same name, which borrowed the famous riff from 'Heaven on Their Minds' from the *Jesus Christ Superstar* musical with added contemporary EDM flavour.

NEIL VAN DER LINDEN

TRACK TO TRY *Talagh*

Syriana
1325 Ibn Battutah
Real World Works

★★★★½



Following a near 14-year break, Syriana return with their first full-length album since 2010's acclaimed debut *The Road to Damascus*. Spearheaded by multi-instrumentalist Bernard O'Neill and guitarist Nick Page – who sadly passed away during recording in 2021 – this new album takes inspiration from the titular Ibn Battuta [also spelled Ibn Battutah], the 14th-century Moroccan explorer and scholar. Conceived as a chronological tone poem following Ibn Battuta's storied 75,000 mile journey across North Africa, Iberia, the Middle East and Central Asia, the music on *1325 Ibn Battutah* is as far-reaching as its subject, featuring a diverse line-up of guest musicians and vocalists.

The opening 'Feast at Antaliyah' begins with a field recording of Sufi musicians in Meknes, evoking Battuta's native Morocco, and the beginning of his journey, in jubilant fashion, before exploding into a high-energy instrumental with Kalia Lyraki's *ney* and Matthaois Tsahouridis' *lyra* at the forefront. Battuta's relationship with his wives and concubines is explored via the seven vocal tracks, with each singer giving voice to the woman in question. 'The Greek Women of Ladhiq' is a simmering percussion-heavy jam, with Maria João Branco interpreting Battuta's words in her native Portuguese. 'Al Karak, Kole Kizin Sarkisi' opens with a haunting *duduk* solo by Harutyun Chkolyan, before giving focus to Olcay Bayir's yearning Turkish-language guest performance. The album ends with 'Law Inta Kont Hina', a dedication to the late Nick Page, sung by Natacha Atlas. It's a fitting conclusion to an album rich in emotions and ambitions.

1325 Ibn Battutah is a project packed with expert musicianship and diverse arrangements.

CHARLIE CAWOOD

TRACK TO TRY *Feast at Antaliyah*

Asia & Pacific REVIEWS

Kuljit Bhamra
A Tablanaut's Journey

Keda Records

★★★☆☆

Hear the *tabla* like you've never heard it before! This may seem a bold claim for an instrument central to subcontinental music for centuries, and redeployed to acclaim in drum'n'bass, jazz and beyond; but it's true.

Kuljit Bhamra has been part of many of tabla's explorations. He has recorded the great gurus, composed for stage and screen, and collaborated on some stunningly beautiful jazz records with saxophonist Andy Sheppard. His diverse career has led Bhamra to experiment by supplementing the traditional two-drum tabla set up with four additional drums, and precisely tuning them to create '*multiphonic tabla*.'

This unique array is deployed to tell Bhamra's life story. His self-taught origins in Southall set him on a 'Road to Non Gurudom' (a provocatively unconventional track). His cultural contributions were such that he received a royal honour, celebrated on 'Path to Honour', a minimalist and melodic piece where the tabla sounds akin to a handpan (inverted steelpan).

This record is unapologetically eccentric. Its greatest legacy may be to show the innovations still possible on this venerable, venerated instrument.

LIAM IZOD

TRACK TO TRY *Path to Honour*

Johanni Curtet
If Only I Could Hibernate

Buda Musique

★★★☆☆

This release is the soundtrack to the film *If Only I Could Hibernate* by Mongolian director Zoljargal Purevdash. It had its European premiere in France on January 10, 2024. Johanni Curtet is a musician, ethnomusicologist, producer and artistic director of Routes Nomades. He has spent the past 20 years studying Mongolian *khöömii*, sometimes known as throat singing. Most of the 20 tracks are short, presumably due to the nature of the film. That said, the six-minute 'Theme of Hope – Final', in which Curtet displays his considerable skills on classical guitar, including a chopsticks-hammered guitar emulating a dulcimer, his marvellous beatbox and throat-singing, evokes hope with a touch of sadness. He is ably accompanied on the horse-head fiddle or *morin khuur* by Mandakhjargal Daansuren while Kham Meslien holds it all down with arrangement contributions on double bass. This simple palette with the addition of the *dan moi*, a metal jaw harp from Vietnam works well. However, the soundtrack release could have been developed further in order for it to stand on its own, separate to the film.

MICHAEL ORMISTON

TRACK TO TRY *Theme of Hope – Final*

ganavya
like the sky I've been too quiet

Native Rebel Recordings

★★★★☆

Born in New York and raised in Tamil Nadu, ganavya has gradually cultivated a glowing reputation as an interdisciplinary artist, vocalist, poet and multi-instrumentalist, collaborating with such esteemed musicians as Quincy Jones, Wayne Shorter and Esperanza Spalding. On this latest release, ganavya presents 13 pieces that skirt the boundaries of improvised music, with elements of jazz, experimental electronica and ganavya's own South Asian traditions. Collaborators include Floating Points and Leafcutter John on modular synthesizer and electronics, Mercury-nominated bassist Tom Herbert, Shabaka Hutchings producing, and Hutchings (under his alter ego of Kofi Flexxx) also on woodwinds. Each provide subtle counterpoint and support to ganavya's arresting central vocal performance. Singing primarily in Tamil, with occasional interlocutions in English, ganavya's delivery ranges from lofty melismas to breathy whispers, with each track feeling its way towards a repeating mantra-like idea. Some pieces, such as 'we made it to the underpass' – an ethereal duet between ganavya and Flexxx's shakuhachi – were audibly recorded on location, adding to a sense of ephemerality that runs through the album. There's an alluring amorphousness to this music, as if each piece is a fragment of time bubbling into existence before gently receding. This results in a deeply cerebral and introspective recording, filled with a sense of quiet wonder and clarity of intention.

CHARLIE CAWOOD

TRACK TO TRY *forgive me my*

LAIR
Ngélar

Guruguru Brain

★★★★☆

Formed in 2018 in the city of Jatiwangi, West Java, LAIR (pronounced 'lah-eer' – taken from the Indonesian word meaning 'birth') are an eclectic mix of psychedelic rock, soul and funk. On *Ngélar*, their second album, the group take inspiration from their hometown – once celebrated as a major producer of clay and terracotta – as well as a local artform called *Panturan Tarling*, a form of grassroots performance art popular in their region of Java. The lyrics deal with the minutiae of everyday life: rituals of harvest, the people's relationship with the land, as well as lamenting the encroaching influence of industrialisation. As such, the album is permeated with a sense of celebration and melancholy, like a party taking place in a ruin. Produced by Go Kurosawa of Kikagaku Moyo, and featuring three collaborations with singer/songwriter Monica Hapsari, the soundscape is suitably psych, replete with fuzzy, arabesque guitar lines, layered percussion and infectious chant vocals. Occasional ambient sounds and field recordings find their way into the mix – the drone of electrical generators and humming guitar amps evoking the buzz of humid air and the stench of engine oil. While LAIR will certainly appeal to fans of other practitioners of global psych, such as Goat and Altın Gün, theirs is a sound that is distinctly Indonesian, imbued with a sense of place unique to them.

CHARLIE CAWOOD

TRACK TO TRY *Bangkai Belantara*

Maisey Rika
Hinamarama

Maisey Rika

★★★★☆

In 1997 at age 13 Aotearoa, New Zealand Māori songstress Maisey Rika was featured performing traditional songs (*waiata*) with her school choir on the award-winning album *E Hine*. She started releasing her own material in 2009, with a mix of bilingual folk, pop and hip-hop influences, and has since matured into one of New Zealand's finest Te Reo (Māori language) singers.

Her brilliant 2020 album *Ngā Mata o te Ariki Tāwhirimātea* (reviewed in #172) was themed around the sacred sky stories of the star cluster Matariki (aka The Pleiades), and while her new release *Hinamarama* stays focused on the heavens, this time she's vocally celebrating the moon. The traditional Māori narratives refer to the lunar phases, environmental calendar system, and the sea-land connections linked to emotions.

With several well-respected Kiwi producers onboard (including Troy Kingi, Tipene Harmer and Kings) as well as traditional Māori *taonga pūoro* instrument masters Horomona Horo and James Webster, Rika's own ever-elegant voice is in good company and on top form. The album contains eight fully produced tracks, several raw acoustic-a cappella versions and two short but gorgeous traditional prayers (*karakia*): 'Tūpurupuru' and 'Hinamarama'. Other standouts include 'Whiro', 'Ngā Wai Ō Roto' and 'Tamatea', which features a righteous rap from Tipene Harmer. *Kia kaha* – stay strong.

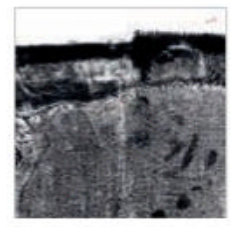
SETH JORDAN

TRACK TO TRY *Whiro*

Sheherazaad
Qasr

Erased Tapes

★★★☆☆



This layered debut explores issues of identity that arise when one's ethnic heritage does not wholly align with one's country of birth. In Sheherazaad's case, her American upbringing is in conversation with her subcontinental heritage. The musical dialogue is engrossing in its intimacy.

'Dhund Lo Mujhe' is a demonic jig powered by sinister pizzicato strings. It seems to communicate turmoil and frustration in pursuit of belonging. 'Koshish' is a more playful tribute to a Californian upbringing, with surf guitar supplementing Sheherazaad's sultry vocals, sounding at times like Lana Del Rey has undertaken Hindustani vocal training. Sheherazaad sought no shortcuts in finding an authentic voice to represent herself and the many who will identify with her. She stopped singing in English as a stand against its colonial

legacy and reshaped her voice in the Hindustani tradition. She found an ally and producer in Arooj Aftab whose acclaimed *Vulture Prince* (A Top of the World album in #169) charts similar territory of dislocation and the diasporic experience. One comes away from *Qasr* – which translates from Urdu as 'fortress' – feeling Sheherazaad has exposed part of her soul.

LIAM IZOD

TRACK TO TRY *Dhund Lo Mujhe*

Sombat Simla
Master of Bamboo Mouth Organ

Black Truffle

★★★★½

The free reed bamboo mouth organ, the *khaen* or *khene*, is the iconic musical instrument of Laotians living in Isan (Northeast Thailand) and Laos. In Thailand, Sombat Simla is widely regarded as one of the finest khaen players in the country, and is sometimes called the 'God of Khaen'. Japanese field recordist and researcher Yasuhiro Morinaga recorded Simla in rural Maha Sarakham province in 2018. The first song Morinaga asked Simla to play was 'Lot Fay Tang Lang', a khaen track that mimics the sounds of a train journey – think of a blues harmonica train song but with added sounds from the journey. Simla obliged and it appears as the mesmerising opening track, 'Line Road Fai – Train'. The album is divided into two parts: five solo pieces by Simla and five *molam* songs accompanied by Mali Moodsansee on percussion and Pattardon Ekchatree on *ching* (small temple cymbals). The solo tunes showcase Simla's delicate phrasing and beautiful tone. The molam songs, recorded in a cowshed, have a typical rolling molam groove and they go right to the present on the final track, 'Khene Lam Sing', a great version of *lam sing*, the most popular molam trend of the day.

JOHN CLEWLEY

TRACK TO TRY *Line Rod Fai – Train*

Abby V
Aarambh

Sufiscore

★★★½☆

Toronto-based singer Abby V (Abby Venkatachalam) teams up with producer-composer and three-time Grammy winner Ricky Kej for *Aarambh*, which means 'beginning' in Sanskrit. The album, released by the UK-based media platform Sufiscore, which has garnered a huge following given its agenda of collaborative music projects around the world, has a set of new compositions and arrangements in a variety of voices featuring traditional light-classical songs most of which are in an old dialect of Hindi. At its core the album is Indian classical but the instrumentation is overtly modern, fusing classical vocals with strings, electronica and beat-based music.

Abby V's singing on *Aarambh* is both pleasing and immensely competent and all the other voices, including such legendary stalwarts as K S Chithra and the very popular Pratibha Singh and others, have their own unique tones and bring a well-executed charm and freshness to these old favourites. Speaking of which, the album's final track is perhaps the only one that doesn't quite fit the bill. A reworking of The Beatles' 'Yesterday', it suffers from some heavy-handed over-production, although the *sitar*, played by Asad Khan, works well. It's a matter of taste but perhaps for those of us who grew up on The Beatles and associate that classic with a rather bare wistfulness, its treatment on *Aarambh* could prove quite unsettling.

JAMEELA SIDDIQI

TRACK TO TRY *Kahe Sataye*

Mark Crannitch

Yirinda
Yirinda

Chapter Music

★★★★½

An inventive duo collaboration between Australian Aboriginal songman Fred Leone and Brisbane-based producer-musician Samuel Pankhurst, Yirinda treads a somewhat delicate path, blending traditional Indigenous vocals with minimalist electronics and production to create experimental soundscapes.

A Garrwa-Butchulla man from the Fraser Coast region of Queensland, who also has Tongan and South Sea Islander roots, Fred Leone has raised his profile considerably over the past few years, impressively guesting on his cousin Birdz' 2021 hip-hop hit ('Bagi-la-m Bargan'), and attracting the solo attention that he deserves with his own recent anthemic track 'Yirimi Gundir'.

Samuel Pankhurst is an acclaimed producer and contrabassist who has scored extensively for contemporary dance productions such as Mia Forrest's *City Crush*. Working together as Yirinda (which means 'Now' in the Butchulla language), this self-titled debut album is an imaginative next step for them both, and was recorded in Brisbane, mixed in London and mastered at Abbey Road.

On diverse tracks like 'Yuangan (Dugong)' and 'Dhangalim (Fly)', Leone's calm clear voice and Butchulla lyrics convey a steady if rather quiet cultural strength, while on 'Guyu (Fish)' and 'Thurum Voi (Look There)', laden with *bargan* (boomerang) as clapsticks, he vocally soars. Elsewhere Pankhurst's subtle bass and electronic contributions continually add a suitably atmospheric ambience to this duo's very impressive creative mix.

SETH JORDAN

TRACK TO TRY *Thurum Voi (Look There)*

VARIOUS ARTISTS
Ulyap Songs: Beyond Circassian Tradition

FLEE Project

★★★★½

Fans of the traditional sounds of the Northern Caucasus will be familiar with the name of Bulat Khalilov and the record label he co-founded, Ored, which focuses on unvarnished but meticulously planned recordings of village music. In this case the village is Ulyap, a small neat settlement in the Adygea Republic with an outsize reputation for its *garmon* accordion players (this information comes from the absorbing 143-page book that accompanies the sounds, where biographies, philosophy and academic essays jostle with one another).

A first listen (without looking at the book) revealed the familiar Ored sound of garmon, group and solo singing, and minor key melodies that circle around themselves via a major key before returning, here leavened with Russian-influenced underworld *chanson*. But then it morphed into something quite unexpected: accordion samples above a bass loop and jerky drums, a choir drenched in reverb and delay, odd scrapings, sporadic electronic drones, ominous strings transforming a cheerful dance song into a thing of menace and jumpy glitches. The record becomes a collaboration between the transnational FLEE collective and Ored, with contributions from experimental artists from the area now living abroad using the recordings as material or inspiration. Endlessly fascinating, with a weird, unsettling beauty.

KIM BURTON

TRACK TO TRY *Evergrowing Tree*

TOP OF THE WORLD TRACK 3

Abdul & The Gang
Kasbatek

Abou Bakre Bensalem / Z Production

★★★★½

'Gnawa funk', a blend of sounds from '*the Orient, from the Maghreb, chaabi melodies and Gnawa rhythms*' is the proclamation of *Kasbatek*, the second album by Abdul & The Gang. It's not a huge sonic departure from their previous release *Chibani*, which brings funk and hip-hop into pan-African rhythms and structures, whereas *Kasbatek* ventures more towards the realms of rock and pop.

It is a fun and energetic listen, with the sonic landscape shifting significantly throughout the duration of the record. The first two tracks, 'Ya Walou (feat Pat Kalla)' and 'Weliti Atomic', have the classic wailing synthesised sound common in much Arabic pop, and bouncy rhythms with a punchy kick drum alongside *beldi* rhythms in percussion, layered over the kit.

Other than the third song 'Amalék', lovers or people with a passing familiarity of what is traditionally known as Gnawa won't find much they recognise in *Kasbatek*; *qaraqab*, *ngonis* or slow chanted open harmonies over rolling percussive triplets do not feature heavily. 'Amalék', part way through, then turns on a dime, dropping unexpectedly into a half-time heavy rock moment with distorted guitar riffs and extended drum fills.

Singing in both French and Arabic, as well as displaying some flare on synthesisers, Abou Ben Salem (aka Abdul) is joined by 'The Gang': drummer Alexandre Bayle, Vincent Tochet on bass, guitarist Kevin Braci and Kevin Roger on trumpet. They craft their aesthetic as conspirators, specifically musical '*traffickers*' in Abdul's words, with the goal being to take elements of traditional music and modern western genres, not adhering to any ingrained rules or hegemonic discipline – to become outlaws of a kind.

And there certainly is a broad mixture of sounds, thrown together in an appropriately rag-tag way. However, at times, it feels like certain musical aspects aren't given enough time or space in the mix to make as big of an impact as they could. The balance of rhythms and melodies becomes muddied, leaving it difficult for the ear to know what to latch on to.

The songs in which they create the deserved breathing space really carry *Kasbatek*. For instance, the Gnawa sound is allowed to come through on songs like 'Amalék', or, on 'Psychoulog', there's strong emphasis on Abdul's rapping, and in 'Gnawi Soul', the group leans into the slow soul sound.

'Deka Beldia' is a thrilling example of what *Kasbatek* does best. From the first note a surging Afrobeat pulse launches you into a three-minute whirlwind, which somehow – probably through very tight drumming – manages to sew together segments of rapping, neat instrumental call-and-response and even an intriguing moment of chanted polyrhythms towards the end. Whilst 'Deka Beldia' is the band's best performance, the final track, 'Brr Brr', is the standout for Abdul's vocals. In between ornamental melodies in brass and a wonderful nasal flute, Abdul switches from rich spoken parts and well woven sung parts; it brings out all of the charisma of the front man – an apt end to the album.

NIK HANN

TRACK TO TRY *Deka Beldia*

Q&A

Abdul

What US influences are behind your sound and how do you balance that with the Gnawa?
At the age of 13 my [late] uncle brought me to a James Brown concert in Paris. Since then, funk entered me. My parents are both musicians. They taught me traditional Moroccan music such as *beldi*, *chaabi* and Gnawa. And subsequently, around 19, I fell in love with the big funk scene with iconic bands like Kool & The Gang and George Clinton.

I often start with a ternary Gnawa melody on the guitar and then I record it on my phone and I let it simmer gently. I add North African percussion like the *krakeb* [*qaraqab*] first, after that it's the *tarija* [...] after a few days a big 'poom-tchak' comes to my mind: the drum has taken over.

Was *Kasbatek* written for the dancefloor, and what other messages do you want to convey with the album?
Kasbatek has been designed and thought for the dancefloor. For example, the sounds chosen for the song 'Psychoulog' are really surrounded by a very simple rhythm [...] with lots of ventilation and a clap that breaks your ears so you have no other choice but to dance. In the song 'Brr Brr', which is Moroccan electro-dubstep, the guitar riffs make your head spin.

The first thing that motivated me was to merge the past with the future [...] My family was initially a little resistant to my music because I deliberately change the codes. Despite this, I did not want to break my dream.

Charles Marlangue

Osama Abdulrasol
(In search of) New Flemish Masters

Enkido Records

★★★☆☆

Abdulrasol is a brave and intriguing musician. A multi-instrumentalist born in Iraq and now based in Belgium, he plays an impressive variety of instruments and styles but now concentrates on the *qanun* and adventurous and grandiose compositions. His aim here is to examine the similarities between Western and Arab musical traditions, and the current state of Flemish music when compared to the Flemish Masters of the 15th century. And he does so mixing European medieval and Arab influences with jazz and electronica, joined by a cast that includes organ and keys, lute, Arabic and Western vocals, and beats from DJ Grasshoppa. The result is a set that is sometimes impressive, sometimes something of an over-ambitious mess. Abdulrasol is a fine qanun player, and is at his best on 'Ya Mariam', where a medieval-sounding religious theme is reworked with his Middle Eastern zither matched against lute, keyboards and fine vocals from Helena Schoeters. The electronica passages are less successful. 'Invitatorium' works well enough because there is a sturdy rhythm track to hold the scratching, qanun and jazz sections together, but on 'Hell' or 'Heaven' the classy acoustic opening passages are interrupted by beats and electronic squeaks that add nothing and sound annoyingly out of place.

ROBIN DENSELOW

TRACK TO TRY *Ya Mariam*

Rosa Anschütz
Interior

Klangbad

★★★★☆

Who said musicians had to stick to one art form? Not the fabulous Rosa Anschütz, a Berlin-based creative – or if you like, '*transmedia artist*' – whose prodigious vision and zeal bursts out across everything from visual art installations to textile design to raw, attitude-laden music-making, sometimes in combination. Having previously flexed her moody, beats-laden, curiously crisis-appropriate aesthetic across two LPs including 2022's punky but fragile *Goldener Storm*, the 20-something Anschütz goes even deeper into her person on this, her third studio album. Spoken and sung lyrics referencing folklore, wilderness and the lessons of heartbreak are framed by instruments including trumpet, blowsy flute and pedal organ, with electronic flashes adding lightning zings to her analogue journeying. Space is of the essence here, carving dramatic pause, allowing her sweetly louche voice to float solemnly, heightening the sense of leftfield spirituality. The loveliness of opening ballad 'By Gaining Many Somethings' serves to make its oh-so-dark follow-up, 'Can You Hear the Dull Scream', all the more menacing.

Anschütz' vocals veer from low and resonant (the Bjork-esque 'A Place Somewhere, We Found the Riptide') to high-register pure (the church organ-led 'My Heart's in the Highlands'), cradling individual words here, flinging phrases down there. The album might have done without the sudden male voice on 'Rain Upon God's Hill' but there's hardly a misstep elsewhere. Closing track 'In Zu Festen Händen Wird Man Nicht Wäm', the only German language song, is an airy tapestry of mutterings, trumpet, church bells and warm, polyphonic coos. An album to disappear into.

JANE CORNWELL

TRACK TO TRY *In Zu Festen Händen Wird Man Nicht Wäm*

JO BISSA x KAN
Losean

Babani Records

★★★☆☆

This is a curious, patchily atmospheric album created by two artists who have never met. JO BISSA is a Dutch producer and electronica exponent while Kan is a multi-instrumentalist from Mauritius, where he uses music as part of his campaign to clean up the ocean. His Trash to Music project involves impressively positive recycling, transforming tin cans or plastic bottles into drums, or pieces of piping into flutes. He then creates a montage of sounds that are blended with samples of noises from the natural world. *Losean* – ocean, in Mauritian Creole – is an ode to the sea, in which Kan's sonic creations are fused with BISSA's electronica. It's an interesting idea, but Kan's recordings are too often reduced to pleasantly ambient background noise, in which unexpected noises are added to more predictable throbbing beats. Kan's two solo tracks are more interesting, with 'Larm Lazwa' involving a kaleidoscope of sounds, including what could be temple bells, echoing voices and robust percussion and basslines, in a nine-minute piece that ebbs and flows like the sea.

ROBIN DENSELOW

TRACK TO TRY *Larm Lazwa*

TOP OF THE WORLD
TRACK 10

Hizbut Jámm
Hizbut Jámm

Instant Classic

★★★★☆

Polish guitarist and composer Raphael Rogiński has been busy. In September his solo album, *Talàn*, garnered rave reviews from all corners, and now this debut from his Warsaw-based outfit has followed in quick succession. Alongside Rogiński, the band features Senegalese singer Mamadou Ba, Burkinabé *kora* player Noums Dembele and Polish percussionist Paweł Szpura. While this may be the quartet's first release, they have been playing together since pre-pandemic times, and *Hizbut Jámm* was conceptualised during the COVID-19 lockdown.

At root, *Hizbut Jámm* is a set of sonic sculptures spanning jazz, folk, psychedelia and experimental sounds, founded on the flutter of Szpura's drums and crowned by Mamadou's bristly vocals, uttered in Wolof and French. Opener 'Caada Gi' mixes mellow, thudding percussion, complex guitar noodling and kora flickers, building to maelstrom before segueing into the soft, psychedelic expanse of 'La Chose'. 'Mbokk Yi' sets itself apart from the pack – a hypnotic slice of moody indie-inflected jazz where Noums' kora gets its moment in the sun, plucked deftly and delicately to trail shimmering melodies around the resonant drone of Mamadou's voice. A subtle yet sweeping set of psychedelic fusion.

OLIVIA CHEVES

TRACK TO TRY *Mbokk Yi*

Svmerki

Fusion REVIEWS

C'Mon Tigre
Habitat

Intersuoni

★★★☆☆

Habitat is the fourth album by C'Mon Tigre, the enigmatic world music collective that has been defying boundaries of genre and geography since 2014. Their unique, multi-layered sound blends myriad influences, most prominently the syncopated drums of samba and the exuberant horn melodies of Afrobeat. As the title suggests, the natural environment is the conceptual heartbeat of the album, with lyrics and sonic landscapes combining to explore earth's richly interconnected abundance of animal and plant life. This is conveyed through a range of languages: English, Portuguese, Spanish, Italian and even a Hindustani vocal sample on 'Nomad at Home'. Intriguingly, the lead vocals are throughout altered with a distorted lo-fi radio effect and sound, almost as if they had been produced by Gorillaz.

Featured artists elevate this bewildering variety of sounds. Seun Kuti's soulful vocals resonate powerfully on the second track 'The Botanist', and Brazilian vocalist Xênia França is haunting and hypnotic on 'Teen Age Kingdom'. Italian singer-songwriter Giovanni Truppi brings an urban hip-hop flavour to his fluid rhymes on 'Sento un Morso Dolce', and Arto Lindsay provides jazz-inflected guitar chords on 'Keep Watching Me'. A wonderfully cerebral, eclectic and ecologically conscious project.

TOM SPARGO

TRACK TO TRY *Teen Age Kingdom (feat Xênia França)*

Ëda Diaz
Suave Bruta

Airfono / Earthly Measures

★★★☆☆

There has recently been a wave of new approaches in Britain and continental Europe to mainland Latin American music, often by transnational figures with roots on both sides of the Atlantic. These hybrid musics are quite varied in emphasis and outlook, but they tend to be rooted in folkloric or popular styles from South America, often using digital samples which are subverted or overlaid by alien materials and compositional forms.

The two heritages that singer, contrabassist and pianist Ëda Diaz draws from are European music, popular and classical, and that of Colombia – itself a variegated map of different musical cultures. Taking a refined and gentle treatment of *parranda* and *vallenato* party music of Medellín and the Caribbean coast, throttling back their sweaty insistence with slow moving harmonies and the sensibility of a *chansonnière*, she has produced a distinctive set of brief and carefully organised songs. Some are fragile, like 'Brisa', others livelier like 'Al Pelo', which succeeds it, like a marimba-infused salsa nursery rhyme subverted by distortions of sound and rhythm. 'Tutandé', on the other hand, is both cheeky and sinister, like a party DJ at the Masque of the Red Death.

KIM BURTON

TRACK TO TRY *Olvidemos Mañana*

Hysterrae
Hysterrae

Linfa

★★★★★

This album brings together four musicians, all women, from three different traditions who draw on music from Afghanistan to southern Italy and, far from differences emerging, it is the confluences which are striking. In a riposte to the album and project's title (which I love), the songs deal with the realities of existence, particularly as seen from a female perspective. The themes range from toxic relationships ('Ruvida'), to loneliness ('Aziz Djun' and 'Kholy'), to life-affirming moments ('Leyli Leyli' and 'Jesce Sole', the latter with a guest appearance by Albanian cellist Redi Hasa). Much of the music is high energy, the traditional instruments given a fair degree of electronic treatment, without obscuring their individual natures. Iranian musician Shadi Fathi on *tar* and *setar* provides much of the melodic interest, and the way she meshes this with the songs is exemplary. However, for me it is the singing, from Cinzia Marzo, Irene Lungo and Silvia Gallone, that stands out, and as the notes rightly say, especially the polyphonic interweaving of vocal lines that runs through many of the tracks. This is an album full of passion and excellent musicianship, given a twist with the careful use of electronics: well worth a listen.

MARIA LORD

TRACK TO TRY *Tramontana*

Mukdad Rothenberg Lankow
Just Leave It All Behind

Clermont Music

★★★☆☆

Music doesn't have to have words in order to say something. *Just Leave It All Behind* sees three

Q&A
Hysterrae

How did the group come together?

SHADI FATHI: Even though we'd known each other for a long time and made various collaborations, we began to work as a real group from 2018, when Giorgio Doveri, artistic director of Irregolare Festival, invited us to make a residency and a concert in Salento. The result of the meeting thrilled both us and the audience, so we began to develop a common repertoire, mixing our respective cultural and musical roots. Initially the project was based exclusively on our acoustic instruments and our voices, then we also involved Emanuele [Flandoli], and we started experimenting a blend of acoustic and electronic sounds, developing today's sound of Hysterrae.

What can you tell us about the Italian rituals that underpin many of the songs?

SILVIA GALLONE: We drew on the rituality and circularity of our ancestral, tribal rhythms; fundamental elements linked to nature, life and the feminine. Pick our song 'Tramontana', inspired by a *tammurriata* of the Madonna Avvocata (Campania). It's the only tammurriata traditionally played by many drums at the same time, making it strong, cathartic, obsessive and hypnotic. Something similar happens in Salento's *ronde di pizzica* (circles of musicians, dancers and spectators), where the main instrument is the tambourine with its triplet, lilting and hypnotic rhythm, closely linked to ancient Greece and Dionysian rites. Circularity also creates a link to the Iranian Sufi world, with its *daf* frame drum, an instrument surrounded by an aura of allegorical and otherworldly legendary beliefs; the circle of daf is considered the symbol of the circle of life.

Altalena Studio

instrumentalists coming together to improvise for peace.

This is the second album from a group collaboration that has been bubbling for years. Each participant is a multi-hyphenate in their work: Wassim Mukdad is a doctor, an *oud* player and an anti-torture campaigner; David Rothenberg is a professor of philosophy, a clarinettist and an interspecies sound artist; Volker Lankow is a nurse, a percussionist and an aid worker for Médecins Sans Frontières. Together, their music-flow touches the worlds of Levantine classical, jazz, acoustic-ambient and even blues.

Although the album is entirely instrumental, its music is inextricably entangled with the importance of human rights and the trio's yearning for peace – for which this release is as timely as any. In the accompanying notes, the artists say that these '*improvisations represent a belief that art can help us get beyond the darkest impulses of humanity*.' However, the end result feels less provocative than that mission statement implies. The musicians and their abilities combine well – this would undoubtedly be a lovely collaboration to experience live, but in an album setting it somewhat lacks a coherent through-narrative. This set is a clarion call for human good, with multiple beautiful moments, but perhaps not as powerful as intended.

JIM HICKSON

TRACK TO TRY *So We Will Survive*

Lee 'Scratch' Perry
King Perry

False Idols

★★★★½

When visionary dub producer Lee 'Scratch' Perry died in 2021, it came as a surprise. At 85, Perry's energy seemed infinite, along with his colourful creativity, spiritual and political engagement, and, of course, his music. This posthumous release, created in collaboration with UK producer Daniel Boyle in the months before Perry's death, emphasises this apparent boundlessness. Still firmly within a dub framework, the album continues to stretch the 'Scratch' Perry soundworld, bringing in influences and sounds from synthy big-beat to contemporary R&B, from bright, poppy beats to drum'n'bass. With a sense of cyclical reciprocity, many of these sounds are indebted to the technical and aesthetic qualities of the early dub that Perry pioneered.

The tracks on *King Perry* feature a host of iconic figures, including dark, dubstep-tinged sounds from producer-rapper Tricky, the smoky voice of Marta (Złakowska), laid-back pop-soul vocals from Greentea Peng, and Happy Monday's Shaun Ryder, on a particularly playful, hip-hop-inspired song. This album is a collaborative space of musing and celebration; it is also wholly Lee Perry. *King Perry* ends with 'Goodbye', Perry's closing word, which echoes, in true Perry fashion, to the end of the record, and into a future shaped, inevitably, by his sonic legacy.

CELESTE CANTOR-STEPHENS

TRACK TO TRY *King of the Animals*

Jean-Paul Raffit & Paamath
Mburu

homerecords.be

★★★★½

Raffit is a French composer and jazz and blues guitarist who 15 years ago founded the Chambre d'Hôte Orchestra. One of life's serial collaborators, on *Mburu* he teams up with the mighty-voiced Senegalese singer Pape Amath N'Diaye, who was born in Dakar before his parents moved to the south of France while he was still young. There he grew up and formed the duo Buru with Francine Tièche in 1990. Known professionally as Paamath he has since released a trio of solo albums and worked with a host of jazz and African musicians from Joe Zawinul to Staff Benda Bilili. He sings here in a deep, resonant voice over Raffit's jazzy riffs and blues lines, blurring the musical trade routes between Africa, the American south and Europe. His scatting style on 'Ndoumbo Ndiaye' has to be heard to be believed while he wails like a soulful *muezzin* calling the faithful to prayer on the mysterious 'Le Chant de la Terre', one of a few tracks on *Mburu* to which Isabelle Bagur adds haunting flute. 'Moudialé' is a 12-bar blues with a Sahelian twist, that conjures an image of Jeff Beck jamming with Ali Farka Touré. As for Raffit, he sounds rather like one might imagine John McLaughlin would have done if he had chosen to fuse his jazz chops with African rather than Indian music.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

TRACK TO TRY *Le Chant de la Terre*

TOP OF THE WORLD
TRACK 8

Arushi Jain
Delight

Leaving Records

★★★★★

With 2021's *Under the Lilac Sky*, Arushi Jain announced herself as a gifted alchemist of electronica and Hindustani music through her mastery of modular synthesizers and classically-trained singing. The concept then was sunsets; now she turns her focus to her personal philosophy of ever-present *Delight*, to be found wherever one seeks it.

This album is an exploration of 'Raga Bageshri', with its implications of love and longing, but the classical element is diffused within flows of downtempo and ambient techno. Jain adds acoustic instruments to her soundscape for the first time – strings, saxophone, flute and marimba all evolve through production to become extensions of the synths. Her voice, too, is warped with a dreamy, reverb-heavy treatment. The distinction between acoustic and electric is never quite clear, the organic and synthetic working together as one organism.

There is a surreal joy inherent in this music, a wonder at all the creative, positive futures we can imagine for ourselves, echoing the 'utopian scholastic' aesthetic that will give 90s kids a healthy dose of nostalgia. The optimism is so refreshing! It's such a feeling of relief. With the world out of balance in so many, seemingly ever-increasing ways, an album that revels in and radiates so much positivity is... well, it's a delight.

JIM HICKSON

TRACK TO TRY *Our Touching Tongues*

Zara Saraon

Fusion REVIEWS

La Sève
Chlorophylle

King Tao

★★★☆☆

French four-piece La Sève (literally 'The Sap') are juicy. Aptly named, they bring the vibe of the tropical forest in the rippling, tumbling rhythms of Congolese rumba and Cameroonian *bikutsi* rock – a genre that developed in the 20th century from the traditional music of the Beti, and is often a song and dance performed by women for healing rituals and significant life events.

The French group are fronted by the charismatic Guillaume Cornuel on electric guitar and vocals, with the electric guitars of Gregory Brustier and Sam Paris swaying beside him, and held in place by the drums of Frédéric Jebejian aka Fitou, they channel the likes of Congo's Flamme Kapaya, Nigeria's Celestine Ukwu and Cameroon's Théodore 'Zanzibar' Epeme in central African grooves to make you move.

Overall, the fairly constant tempo and limited vocals give a sense of an extended jam session, especially in the early tracks, but for lovers of Congoloese *soukous* and rumba by greats such as Tabu Ley Rochereau, Franco Luambo and Kanda Bongo Man, this is great fun, while the lesser-known sounds of Cameroon add a different dimension.

NATHANIEL HANDY

TRACK TO TRY *Foula*

Çiçek Taksi

Çiçek Taksi
Bin Dilde

CCK

★★★★☆

'Flower Taxi' in English, present their second album, which means 'in a thousand languages.' Singer Selin Dettwiler, of Turkish-Kurdish background has brought together three Swiss musicians on clarinet, accordion and bass, to set to music nine poems written by Turkish-speaking people living in Switzerland.

The band's sound is similar to some modern klezmer groups such as Kroke or Brave Old World, due mainly to the combination of instrumentation and tonality – there being much historical common ground in these two seemingly different toneworlds. Accordion fills a huge harmonic space in the tracks on *Bin Dilde* with clarinet weaving a counterpoint around the vocals and bass underpinning and driving the rhythm. There is minimal processing on this recording and the quartet don't really need much, being able to conjure an extremely dynamic texture by themselves.

Some highlights include the title-track: a drone-laden and spacious song with a plaintive air; and 'Yürek Kiri' with its catchy hook, epic builds and groovy bass solos. As usual with this kind of thing, speaking the language would help one to reach the optimum experience but, even without this, *Bin Dilde* is a joy to listen to.

TOM NEWELL

TRACK TO TRY *Yürek Kiri*

Touki
Plastic Man

Captain Pouch Records

★★★☆☆

The British-based Senegalese singer, *kora* player and percussionist Amadou Diagne and American-in-Paris guitarist Cory Seznec recorded *Plastic Man* at Real World with an Arts Council grant. Calling themselves Touki – it means 'journey' in Wolof – it's essentially a global folk album fusing African and Appalachian styles, often in thrilling fashion. The duo sing in contrasting styles, Diagne's voice offering a gritty, husky counterpoint to Seznec's light, attractive baritone – but it's the instrumental interplay that really grabs the attention. Nowhere is this more evident than on the scintillating 'Wenchi Breakdown', as backwoods banjo, African percussion and Endris Hassen's Ethiopian *masenqo* (one-stringed bowed lute) tumble over each other in breakneck fashion. Hassen then repeats the trick on 'Diallo Djeri', a tune with a deep, bluesy vibe. On 'La-Hi-La-Ha' and 'Tellem Dreams' scratchy West African grooves combine with the fiddle playing of Duncan Wickel, the title-track is '*an mbalax-inspired homage to climate activist Modou Fall*' and 'Wounded Bird Fly Again' is an acoustic guitar tune rooted in East Africa's finger-picking *omutibo* style. The approach is simplicity itself – and yet there are enough inventive ideas here to fill not just one but several albums.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

TRACK TO TRY *Wenchi Breakdown*

Wajdi Riahi Trio
Essia

Fresh Sound New Talent

★★★★☆

Tunisian-born, Brussels-based pianist Wajdi Riahi is undoubtedly adept at composing and performing melodically and rhythmically complex contemporary jazz. Aided ably by bassist Basile Rahola and drummer Pierre Hurty, he creates the kind of richly emotional piano trio journeys popularised by the likes of Esbjörn Svensson. If this runs the risk of being somewhat unremarkable, Riahi's engagement with his Arab roots boosts his music onto another level, lending it a uniquely fascinating twist.

On the trio's second album, follow-up to 2022's *Mhamdeya*, the North African influences are even more pronounced – particularly in the incorporation of elements of Moroccan Gnawa and its Tunisian cousin, *stambeli*. On 'Hymn To Stambeli', Rahola's double bass intro imitates a *gimbri* warming up, before piano and bass roll out a burbling approximation of a healing trance vibe accompanied by boisterous drums and chattering *qaraqab* castanets. It's enough to propel Riahi's solo into joyous realms of transported energy.

Elsewhere, it's Riahi's vocals that send the music in unexpected directions. 'Yala Quawmi' is a limpid ballad held together by delicate tendrils of piano and sparse percussion, providing a fertile bed for Riahi's gorgeously drowsy Arabic song. Who knew that microtonal vocal technique should sit so comfortably next to aching, blue piano notes?

DANIEL SPICER

TRACK TO TRY *Hymn to Stambeli*

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Sigrid Moldestad

BREIM

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CAIROKEE

MY WORLD

Michael Volpe

Nigel Williamson chats to a son of Italian immigrants hell-bent on breaking down social barriers by making opera and culture accessible to all

Michael Volpe grew up in two different musical worlds. Born in London in the 1960s to immigrant parents from southern Italy, in his highly readable new memoir *Do I Bark Like a Dog?* and its predecessor *Noisy at the Wrong Times*, he evokes a childhood spent listening equally to the prog-rock of Genesis and Pink Floyd and the traditional folk songs of his Italian heritage by singers such as Roberto Murolo, Sergio Bruni, Renato Carosone and Mario Merola. The former he heard all around him. The latter he heard via his mother's collection of vinyl records in tattered paper sleeves to which she would sing along, often getting tearful for her homeland.

Both "triggered the same visceral emotion" and it launched an "obsession" with music that shaped his sense of who he was and his place in the world. "How I perceive myself has always been framed by my immigrant family and childhood experiences, by the culture and language around me," he tells *Songlines*, sitting in the kitchen of his west London home. "I thought it was great growing up with these two different things. It made me more windswept and interesting."

It also meant it was in his DNA for his ears to be open to new sounds and styles; barriers between different musical genres were porous to the point of non-existence. To this day his love of English pop (XTC), American jazz (George Duke), acoustic folk (John Martyn) and prog-rock sits without friction alongside the mesmerising, lyrical *canzone napoletana* repertoire which he calls "a breathless balm for the soul" and the classical music which was added to the mix during his years at a very traditional English public school.

"How I perceive myself has always been framed by my immigrant family and childhood experiences"

Singing in the choir at the age of 13 or 14 in a performance of Handel's *Messiah* gave him "the idea there could be something a little rock'n'roll about choral music." Then in 1996 at the age of 31, he founded Opera Holland Park, a glorious summer festival in west London, like a metropolitan and more inclusive version of Glyndebourne.

Awarded an OBE for services to music, he remained its general director until 2020 and now leads If Opera, a not-for-profit charitable organisation which stages a magical summer festival in Bradford-on-Avon, focusing on supporting emerging artists. "Opera chose me, not the other way around," he says.

Under Volpe's directorship Opera Holland Park became especially associated with the Italian 19th-century operatic style known as *verismo* – stab-and-sob operas full of violent passions, catastrophic tragedy and music that at times is deliberately overwrought.

"The tortured strings, engorged with melody and tinged with Italian folk music, seemed to evoke a landscape and society I felt utterly familiar with," he says. "There is a kind of synaesthesia at play when I listen to them – cue the string *intermezzo* and here come the visions of mountains, the cacophony of washer women at the fountain and the whiff of wild herbs."

Driving to the opera with Pink Floyd or Genesis on in the car might have felt like commuting between two different worlds – but not a bit of it. Both, he says, are part of the same "giant magic trick" that is the power of music and which spans the globe, whether it's the elements of African music in the work of Peter Gabriel or the Brazilian influences on some of his favourite jazz records by George Duke and Pat Metheny. Perhaps unsurprisingly, one of his favourite singers is the late great South African Sibongile Khumalo, whose repertoire spanned opera, jazz and traditional township music.

After almost 30 years working in the world of opera, Volpe's eclectic musical curiosity remains so insatiable that an analysis of his use of streaming services in 2023 shows that he listened to 670 different artists, 587 of whom he had not listened to before. The notion that there is a distinction between high and lowbrow music fills him with contempt. "Opera in Italy is just part of life," he notes. "Italian composers use huge amounts of folk idioms which is why it impacts so strongly on me. It's music of the people in that it has emerged naturally from a culture."

Indeed, for much of the 19th and 20th centuries almost every community in Italy had its own *banda municipale* playing rustic versions of arias by Verdi, Bellini, Donizetti and others. Nor is this two-way street confined to Italian opera – think Bizet's *Carmen* with its *habaneras* and *seguidillas* or Dvořák's use of traditional Slavonic dances in *Rusalka*.

In recent years Volpe has been disappointed by the way the values that he admired most about Britain (fair play, democracy, integrity and a sense of community) seem to have been eroded. Brexit, he fears, has been a Trojan Horse that has seen a rise in "increasingly violent, hateful language aimed at immigrants and asylum seekers and under the rallying cry of 'anti-woke' is moving inexorably towards a plethora of other minorities."

The only answer, he believes, is "to flood the country with culture" and particularly with what he calls "cross-cultural engagement." Volpe's own contribution to that engagement has included a series of short films designed to break down social and cultural barriers. In one, *From Footy to Verdi*, he took some Chelsea football fans, who could scarcely imagine a more alien world than classical music, to a rehearsal and performance of *La Traviata* at the Royal Opera House.

A second film, *Into the Light*, featured UK ex-forces personnel suffering from PTSD and mental health issues and showed how although music cannot heal on its own, it possesses a unique power to affect our sense of self and to set our histories and anxieties into context. A third film, 2018's *Hip Hop to Opera*, about introducing eight Black inner-city teenagers whose cultural reference point was rap music to another world, won Volpe a nomination for Best Director and Best Short Documentary at the Milan International Film Festival.

His own "dream project" would be a multicultural opera involving Nitin Sawnhey, XTC songwriter Andy Partridge and Kate Bush. If it is unlikely ever to happen, even imagining such an inspiring collaboration lifts the spirits. "Culture is what humanises a society," Volpe says at the end of our hour-long conversation, with a disarming simplicity that makes it seem self-evident. The only problem that remains is how to convince our politicians. ◆

***+ Michael Volpe**'s memoir **Do I Bark Like a Dog?** is published April 27 by Renard Press*

MICHAEL VOLPE'S
MY WORLD PLAYLIST

Genesis - *Seconds Out*
Roberto Murolo 'Voce 'e Notte'
John Martyn 'One World'
XTC - *English Settlement*
Sibongile Khumalo 'Breath of Life'
George Duke - *A Brazilian Love Affair*
Mascagni - *Iris* (Opera)
Pat Metheny - *Still Life (Talking)*
Handel - *Messiah*

Fruko

A one-man tropical orchestra generator, there can be few musicians who have left a bigger imprint on their country's music than Fruko. ***Silvia Rothlisberger*** tracks down the Colombian bandleader

The story of Julio Ernesto Estrada Rincón (born 1951, Medellín, Colombia), better known as Fruko, is a story worthy of a biopic. Tracing his 60-year-long career is tracing the history of tropical music in Colombia from the 1960s onwards. He is a prodigious arranger, producer, bandleader and multi-instrumentalist, and founder of the most epic orchestra in Latin America, Fruko y Sus Tesos, the first orchestra dedicated exclusively to salsa in Colombia. Fruko was also at the centre of the golden years of the record label Discos Fuentes and founded many other bands along the way. What makes his achievements more impressive is that he didn't finish high school or study music, at least not in an academic institution. "I'm auto-didactic, to be a musician is to have a gift. It's something you carry inside, and I have the gift of carrying music inside," says Fruko, when I meet him in London between rehearsals for an upcoming show.

At 11 years old Fruko was kicked out of school and two of his uncles, both of whom were sound engineers, found him a job as a utility man at Discos Fuentes, an important record label that launched the careers of emerging musicians and introduced styles like *cumbia*, *fandango*, *porro*, *merengue* and salsa to the nation. Think of it as the Colombian Motown. For Fruko, working at the label was the equivalent of music school, as Antonio Fuentes, the founder of Discos Fuentes, took him under his wing and taught him everything about music production. Fruko's own curiosity and ambition led him to grab the instruments and experiment with them. Starting with percussion, he then moved on to more harmonic instruments. "The instrument I like the most is the bass guitar; he is my friend. We're very fond of each other," he says holding his metallic grey bass guitar tightly in his arms. "The bass is the most important instrument," he continues. "With this instrument you can lead the harmonic and the percussive part of the orchestra."

Back to those first months of Fruko at Discos Fuentes, and one day he suggested a new sound with the *timbal* for a song by Los Corraleros de Majagual and with this addition they created the group's signature song, 'La Burrita', with Fruko, in 1965, joining the most representative band of Caribbean music in Colombia at the time on the *timbales*. "I had a lot of fun during my adolescence travelling all over the world with Los Corraleros de Majagual; and with the teachings of Antonio Fuentes I became a good producer with different orchestras and different rhythms," he says proudly.

Courtesy of Discos Fuentes

In the 60s Fruko spent time in Venezuela and New York City with Los Corraleros de Majagual and became entralled by the new salsa orchestras. "There I saw the artists at the centre of the salsa movement: Willie Colón, Héctor Lavoe, Richie Ray, Bobby Cruz, Tito Puente, and we alternated with them," he gushes. This was when his nickname 'Fruko' arose, as someone pointed out how he looked like the character in an ad for tomato sauce (*salsa de tomate*). Fruko saw the connection between salsa de tomate and salsa music and embraced the sauce's brand name: Fruko.

After playing with Los Corraleros for six years, in 1970, at the age of 19, he created Fruko y Sus Tesos, the first group wholly devoted to salsa in Colombia. He based his band on New York's Fania All-Stars, a brainchild of salsa powerhouse Fania Records. "To imagine a band as famous as Fruko y Sus Tesos, that could compete with musicians who had studied music at university level I had to prepare, practice, record and build a sound that was pioneering this genre in Colombia," he admits. His influences came from Cuba, Puerto Rico, New York and the coastal rhythms of Colombia, in particular cumbia, arriving to a salsa with a Colombian twist. The band has released over 40 albums to date and is indelible in the musical memory of Colombians through hit songs like 'El Preso', 'Tania', 'El Ausente', 'Cachondea' and 'El Caminante'. With vocals by the virtuosic Wilson 'Saoko' Manyoma, 'El Preso' has become a salsa anthem. It's a prayer, a lament from those behind bars and a great example of how each song often tells a profound, sometimes dark story with a flowing vigorous rhythm. Wilson Saoko was one of many artists that Fruko nurtured and catapulted into fame. Joe Arroyo was perhaps the most famous of a list that also includes Juan Carlos Coronel, Piper 'Pimienta' and Joseito Martinez. "I became a producer and I looked for talented musicians in all corners of Colombia," Fruko says. That's why he called the band Fruko y Sus Tesos (Fruko and His Toughest) because he always looked for the most talented musicians. "Having perfect pitch allows me to hear someone singing and know 'this is the voice that I need for this song' or 'this is the instrumentalist, let's say, trumpet player, that I need for this orchestra,'" he adds.

> **"I looked for talented musicians in all corners of Colombia"**

The way Fruko y Sus Tesos were presented was heavily inspired by the US hippie culture of the 60s or, as Fruko calls it, "the Woodstock generation"; they wore leather vests, love beads and afros, all adding to Fruko's reputation as a rebellious, counter-cultural figure. The relationship with the US was reciprocal, with the group representing Colombia at a *Salsa International Concert* at NYC's Madison Square Garden in 1978, and they regularly featured in *Record World* (US) magazine in the 70s.

Yet, his contributions to tropical music go beyond salsa as, parallel to Fruko y Sus Tesos, Fruko took part in the creation of many more bands at Discos Fuentes. He reformed the cumbia orchestra La Sonora Dinamita after it had been on hiatus for 12 years; wanting to explore other popular tropical genres, he created The Latin Brothers; when Peru's psychedelic take on cumbia began getting attention in Colombia, he created Afrosound; and when Fela Kuti's influence arrived on the Colombian coast, he founded Wganda Kenya.

Now, 73, Fruko is still going strong, and is currently working on a new album with his Tesos. When I met him in London he was preparing to perform with Classico Latino and Omar Puente at Kings Place to perform songs from a new album they had all made together, *Salsa Classics*. With a career spanning 60 years, and having recorded more than 8,000 songs, Fruko has soundtracked the lives of Latin Americans and tropical music lovers all over the world. Now, who's going to make that biopic? ◆

Fruko y Sus Tesos with (L-R) Fruko, Wilson Saoko and Joe Arroyo in the front row

+ *Fruko & The Bonita House Band* *will play The Jazz Cafe, London on April 19 as part of La Linea 24*

BEST ALBUMS

Fruko
A la Memoria del Muerto
(Discos Fuentes, 1972)
Essentially the second Fruko y Sus Tesos album, this one exclusively featured the vocals of Cali-native Piper 'Pimienta' Díaz. The irreverent title-track was the group's first hit. The album saw the group go beyond salsa to explore *guaguancó*, *bomba*, *plena*, *oriza*, *bolero*, *chachachá*, *descarga* and Latin soul.

Afrosound
La Danza de los Mirlos
(Discos Fuentes, 1973)
The Fruko-led Afrosound were a successful attempt at creating Peruvian-style psychedelic *cumbia* with guitar at the fore. The album's first track is the most famous Afrosound hit of all, 'Caliventura', a blend of funk and cumbia. It also features guitar-heavy tropical sounds, hippie vibes and rocking, *bomba*-funk.

Fruko y Sus Tesos
Fruko el Grande
(Discos Fuentes, 1975)
Featuring the vocals of Wilson Saoko and Joe Arroyo, along with the biggest salsa hit ever recorded in Colombia, 'El Preso' (The Prisoner). There are no weak links on this one.

Wganda Kenya
Afromania Caribe
(Discos Fuentes, 1984)
An album that combines the frantic rhythms of Afrobeat with 70s funk and Latin flavours. It features their most successful song, 'Shakalode', a reinvention of Fela Kuti's 'Shakara'.

The Latin Brothers
¡Para Bailar!
(Discos Fuentes, 1986)
The Latin Brothers were another salsa orchestra led by Fruko, and *¡Para Bailar!* is an album of life-affirming energy that embodies the tropical rhythms of *cumbia*, salsa and *danzón*.

IF YOU LIKE FRUKO Y SUS TESOS, THEN TRY...

Joe Arroyo y la Verdad
Musa Original
(Discos Fuentes, 1986)
Nurtured by Fruko, Joe Arroyo created his own Caribbean genre: *Joesón*. He combined salsa, *cumbia*, calypso, *merengue*, *soca* and Afro-Colombian rhythms like *champeta* and *porro*. In 2011, he was posthumously awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award during the Latin Grammys. In *Musa Original*, you'll find 'Rebelión', another bona fide salsa anthem.

LA LINEA 24
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SOPHIE CASTILLO + MILENA SANCHEZ
TANGOPERA + BAQUE LUAR + EDA DIAZ
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Buenos Aires, Argentina

Juan José Remulcao reports from Argentina where, following the election of a new president, music and politics are entering an unknown zone

L-R: La Renga's Gustavo 'Chizzo' Napóli and Gabriel 'Tete' Iglesias

What's the purpose of a city? If you found yourself in Buenos Aires during one of these recent summer nights, then you would know the answer: it is, quite simply, a means to get to a rock show. But not any rock show: I am referring to La Renga at Racing Stadium, who played for four nights, each to 50,000 people. With 35 years behind them, La Renga are one of Argentina's main rock bands. Why, unlike Soda Stereo, have they not achieved international success in a similar way? The reason holds what might be a key for Argentine culture in the years to come: the group's operation, which is close to a community-led organisation; they normally organise their own shows and release albums through their own label. Over the years, their gigs have become increasingly popular and it was at one of those shows – more like a collective ritual than an average night out – that they expressed their political point of view: "Beware, Milei," espoused Gustavo 'Chizzo' Napóli, the band's singer. It was one week after Javier Milei had won the presidential elections and La Renga were in Ushuaia, the most southern city in the world. A place known, in both poetics and history, as 'the end of the world.'

The warning came after Milei used one of La Renga's hits to promote his campaign. La Renga, whose songs have spoken repeatedly against neoliberalism, extractivism and repression, showed their discontent. But Milei stood as his newly-appropriated soundtrack played, and even sang it during his campaign. Believe it or not, the song is called 'Panic Show'; the president had to deny repeated panic attacks, and the lyrics contain a line that nobody, not even Milei, should overlook: *'I am the king of a lost world.'*

If losses are the issue, Argentina's cultural sector is currently experiencing major threats. To begin with, the Ministry of Culture was reduced to a National Secretary as soon as the government began. Then, in a major package of laws the new executive is trying to approve in Congress as this article goes to press, the National Arts Fund and Theater Institute are being abolished. As part of a wider austerity package, this provoked a reaction in every cultural sector and, with the National Congress as epicentre, there have been *cacerolazos* (pot-banging sessions), protests and strikes across the country. As demonstrations took place, the Culture Secretary had to contradict the new laws and clarify that the National Arts Fund and Theater Institute will still work, though not as institutions but '*programs*.' The actual operation of both, as well as several other bodies affected by the proposed legislation, is still to be clarified.

When the primary elections gave glimpses of this dark new future, two emblems of urban music reacted instantly. Trueno, who performed with Damon Albarn at Quilmes Rock Festival 2022, and Ca7riel, felt they had to talk about risks. *'Your rights are the only thing you have. Do not give yourself away,'* tweeted Trueno, while Ca7riel exposed an unknown part of his personal life: '*I had the privilege of going to school because it was free and public, and I couldn't have gone because I didn't have the money to pay for my education. If the hospitals were all private I would be dead because more than once doctors from public hospitals have saved my life... Beware! In the future, you are going to need things and you are not going to be able to ask for them because those are rights. When there is a need, there is a right.*'

As old as the Andes, the long tradition of socially sensitive folk artists heralding from Argentina has already entered a new era. It was Peteco Carabajal, a descendant from a traditional family of *músicos del pueblo*, who made history in mid-January. He was performing at Jesús María Festival when Vice President Victoria Villarruel, who has denied the crimes committed during the last dictactorship, entered the venue and was announced by the host. '*Do not stand up, nobody has entered,*' claimed Peteco, repeating the phrase several times. The show went on anyway, with the festival hosts attempting to gloss over the moment. But the echoes of Peteco's reaction are just beginning to reverberate.

Save the date: March 24. The Memory Day for Truth and Justice is a milestone for Human Rights in South America. To put this day in context, it is useful to consider that Brazil and Chile, despite having had brutal dictatorships do not have an official date to commemorate the victims and celebrate democracy. Argentina has had a Memory Day for decades. March 24 will offer proof of the country's discontent. The government has already said that it does not want demonstrations and will use '*necessary force*' to repress them. Is that the purpose of a city? To dissuade? Songs about times like these have been sung a thousand times. ◆

MARCH–APRIL 2024

Gig Guide

Akiko Kubota

Songlines picks...

On an Endless Road (Mar 5-9, London & North) Akiko Kubota leads a programme of music by and about trailblazing Japanese women such as feminist anarchist Itō Noe.

Afghan Youth Orchestra (Mar 7-12, London, Midlands & North) *Breaking the Silence* tour featuring exiled members of the Afghanistan National Institute of Music.

Bongeziwe Mabandla (Mar 9-10, London & North) South African musician fusing Xhosa folk music with electronics; Mabandla's shows have been getting rave reviews.

Rastak (Mar 28, London) Great chance to see the much-loved septet ensemble who have been exploring a diverse range of Iranian folk music for over 25 years.

The Rheingans Sisters (Apr 4-13, On Tour) Scandi-noir tinged with joy and avant-garde trad from the Radio 2 Folk Award-winning sisters who have a new album on the way.

LONDON

1 MAR Laura Cannell + Stick in the Wheel Cafe OTO; **2 MAR Matt McGinn** The Harrison; **3 MAR Srishti: Pathways** The Bhavan; **Erkan Oğur & İsmail Hakki Demircioğlu** EartH; **4 MAR Imagining Ireland** Barbican barbican.org.uk; **5 MAR Bossa Nova Songbook: The Music of Antonio Carlos Jobim** Brasserie Zédel; ***On an Endless Road: Itō Noe and the Women Composers of Her Time*** The Actors' Church; **Omar Rios Quartet** PizzaExpress Jazz Club Soho; **6 MAR Osibisa** Jazz Café thejazzcafelondon.com; **Alex Wilson & Omar Puente Quartet** PizzaExpress Jazz Club Soho; **7 MAR VOŁOSI** St Martin-in-the-Fields; **Afghan Youth Orchestra** Queen Elizabeth Hall; **7-10 MAR South Asian Sounds** Southbank Centre; **8 MAR Shivaratri** The Bhavan; **9 MAR Bongeziwe Mabandla** EartH; **9-10 & 16-17 MAR Sangeet Utsav: Indian Classical Music Festival** The Bhavan; **10 MAR Jards Macalé** Jazz Cafe; **12 MAR Getz/Gilberto 60th Anniversary with Raquel Martins & Friends** Jazz Cafe; **13 MAR Muito Kaballa** The 100 Club; **15 MAR Matices Latinos** Quartet Brasserie Zédel; **KOG** Fox & Firkin; **15-16 MAR Spring Ceilidh** Grand Junction thenestcollective.co.uk; **17 MAR Anna Mudeka** Rich Mix; **19 MAR Buika** Barbican; **Pádraig Rynne, Tara Breen & Jim Murray** London Irish Centre; **20 MAR Goran Bregović** indigo at The O2; **23 MAR Punita Gupta** The Bhavan; **24 MAR Avijit Das** The Bhavan; **25 MAR Songlines@25** Barbican; **27 MAR Sam Kelly & Jamie Francis** Cecil Sharp House; **28 MAR Rastak** Barbican; **Googoosh** OVO Arena Wembley; **29 MAR Disco Tehran** Jazz Cafe; **Sonu Nigam** OVO Arena Wembley; **30 MAR Sasvatam 2024** The Bhavan; **2 APR Djanan Turan & The Flying Karpet Collective** Jazz Cafe; **5 APR Hannah Rarity** Kings Place; **6 APR Anoushka Shankar** Barbican; **Vaisakhi** Trafalgar Square, London FREE london.gov.uk/events; **11 APR Roots and Endz** Rich Mix; **Nitin Sawhney** Alexandra Palace Theatre; **12 APR Omar Puente Charanga Sextet** Ronnie Scott's; **12-13 APR Aakash Odedra Company + Aditi Mangaldas Company** Sadler's Wells.

SOUTH

2 MAR Calum Gilligan The Barbican Theatre, Plymouth; **7 MAR Latchepen** Sydling St Nicholas Village Hall; **8 MAR Latchepen** Winterborne Stickland Pamela Hambro Hall; **9 MAR Latchepen** Powerstock Hut; **Women of the World** Holy Trinity Church, Folkestone equatorfestival.com; **10 MAR Latchepen** Studland Village Hall; **22 MAR Sam Kelly & Jamie Francis** Grayshott Folk Club; **Maya Youssef** Turner Sims, Southampton; **24 MAR Holi Celebration** Victoria Park, Ashford equatorfestival.com; **30 MAR Holi Festival of Colours** Baltic, Gateshead FREE gemarts.org; **5-7 APR Afro Cuban Spring Fiesta** Royal Norfolk Hotel, Bognor Regis afrocuban.co.uk; **Ramblin' Roots Revue** High Wycombe ramblinrootsrevue.co.uk; **6 APR Ahmed Dickinson Cardenas & Eduardo Martín** The Acorn Theatre, Penzance; **7 APR Ahmed Dickinson Cardenas & Eduardo Martín** Ashburton Arts Centre; **9 APR Nitin Sawhney** Brighton Dome; **10 APR Ahmed Dickinson Cardenas & Eduardo Martín** St Catherine's Church, Ventnor.

WALES & WEST

7 MAR Roopa Panesar RWCMD, Cardiff; **15 MAR Martin & Eliza Carthy** Rhos-y-Gilwen, Cardigan; **Muito Kaballa** The Jam Jar, Bristol; **16 MAR** [3pm] **Catrin Finch & Aoife Ní Bhriain** Painswick Music Society; **18 MAR Pádraig Rynne, Tara Breen & Jim Murray** Caffi Isa, Mold;

songlines.co.uk/gig-guide All information correct at time of going to press. Email listings for print and online consideration to listings@songlines.co.uk

21 MAR **Dele Sosimi** Clwb Ifor Bach, Cardiff; **23 MAR** **Juan Martín** Neuadd Ogwen, Bethesda; **28 MAR** **The London African Gospel Choir** Bristol Beacon; **4 APR** **Maya Youssef** St George's Bristol.

MIDLANDS

8 MAR **The Budapest Café Orchestra** Wells Maltings, Wells-next-the-Sea; **9 MAR** **The Budapest Café Orchestra** The Corn Hall, Diss; **12 MAR** **Afghan Youth Orchestra** Town Hall, Birmingham; **14 MAR** [1pm] **Millicent Chapanda & Henri Gaobi** Symphony Hall, Birmingham FREE; **17 MAR** **Pádraig Rynne, Tara Breen & Jim Murray** Norton's, Digbeth; **24 MAR** **Poppy Folk Day** Nottingham poppyfolkclub.co.uk; **29-31 MAR** **Sheffield Folk Sessions Festival** Kelham Island, Sheffield sheffieldfolksessionsfestival.co.uk; **30 MAR** **A Celebration of Holi** Symphony Hall, Birmingham sampad.org.uk; **5-7 APR** **KlezNorth** Youlgrave kleznorth.org.uk; **Sing in the Spring** The Fleece Inn, Bretforton thefleeceinn.co.uk; **6 APR** **Jon Doran & The Northern Assembly** The Ropewalk, Barton-upon-Humber; **8 APR** **Nitin Sawhney** Town Hall, Birmingham.

NORTH

2 MAR **Srishti: Pathways** New College Bradford; **Grupo Luma** Music Room, Liverpool; **7 MAR** [1pm] ***On an Endless Road: Itō Noe and the Women Composers of her Time*** University of Huddersfield Concert Series FREE; **8 MAR** **Ando Glaso Collective** Firth Hall, Sheffield; ***On an Endless Road: Itō Noe and the Women Composers of her Time*** Martin Harris Centre, University of Manchester; **9 MAR** ***On an Endless Road: Itō Noe and the Women Composers of her Time*** Howard Assembly Room, Leeds; **Afghan Youth Orchestra** Tung Auditorium, Liverpool; **10 MAR** **Bongeziwe Mabandla** Band on the Wall, Manchester; **11 MAR** **Afghan Youth Orchestra** Stoller Hall, Manchester; **15 MAR** **Prattyush Banerjee & Rajkumar Misra** The Glasshouse, Gateshead; **16 MAR** **KOG** Yellow Arch Studios, Sheffield; **Muito Kaballa + Zolatec** Band on the Wall, Manchester; **Vox Sambou** Howard Assembly Room, Leeds; **17 MAR** **A St Patrick's Day Celebration** Music Room, Liverpool liverpoolphil.com; **Muito Kaballa** Headrow House, Leeds; **21 MAR** **Sajan Misra** Culture Lab, Newcastle University; **22 MAR** **Juan Martín** Storyhouse, Chester; **23 MAR** ***Raga@7*** Seven Arts, Leeds saa-uk.org; **24 MAR** **Vox Sambou** Band on the Wall, Manchester; **30 MAR** **Dele Sosimi Afrobeat Orchestra** Band on the Wall, Manchester; **31 MAR** **Sonu Nigam** First Direct Arena, Leeds; **4 APR** **Ranagri** The Ferret, Preston; **5 APR** **The London African Gospel Choir** Philharmonic Hall, Liverpool; **Ranagri** Barnoldswick Music & Arts Centre; **Maya Youssef** Brewery Arts, Kendal; **O'Hooley & Tidow** Halifax Minster; **6 APR** **The Breath** Brewery Arts, Kendal; **Mikey Kenney** More Music, Morecambe; **7 APR** **Mikey Kenney** The John Peel Centre, Wigton; **Jon Doran & The Northern Assembly** The Horse & Farrier, Otley.

SCOTLAND

6 MAR **The Poozies** Edinburgh Folk Club; **9 MAR** **Ryan Young + David Delacroix** Sutherland Sessions, Dornoch; **13 MAR** **Archie Fisher** Edinburgh Folk Club; **14 MAR** **Anna Mudeka** Roxy Upstairs, Edinburgh; **15 MAR** **Cahalen Morrison** Carnegie Hall, Sandwick; **Kris Drever** Sutherland Sessions, Dornoch; **16 MAR** **Cahalen Morrison** The Dowry, Lerwick; **20 MAR** **Àirdan** Edinburgh Folk Club; **27 MAR** **Alastair McDonald** Edinburgh Folk Club; **28 MAR** **Ron Jappy** Stonehaven Town Hall; **29 MAR** **Ron Jappy** Findochty Town Hall; **30 MAR** **Ron Jappy** Mash House, Edinburgh; **31 MAR** **Ron Jappy** The Rum Shack, Glasgow; **5 APR** **Sonu Nigam** SEC Armadillo, Glasgow; **7 APR** **Nitin Sawhney** Old Fruitmarket, Glasgow.

IRELAND
(Republic & Northern)

8 MAR **Christy Moore** Slieve Russell Hotel, Cavan; **14 & 27 MAR** **Christy Moore** Killashee Hotel, Naas; **15-18 MAR** **Kilkenny Tradfest** Kilkenny kilkennytradfest.com; **22 MAR** **Christy Moore** University Concert Hall, Limerick; **Cinder Well** Duncairn Arts & Cultural Centre, Belfast; **22-24 MAR** **Ballydehob Tradfest** Ballydehob; **23 MAR** **Cinder Well** Unitarian Church, Dublin; **24 MAR** **Cinder Well** Róisin Dubh, Galway; **25 MAR** **Cinder Well** Coughlan's, Cork; **4 APR** **Christy Moore** National Opera House, Wexford.

TOURS

Aly Bain & Phil Cunningham
Scottish fiddle and accordion duo

14 MAR The Maltings, Berwick-upon-Tweed; **15 MAR** Coronation Hall, Ulverston; **16 MAR** The Glasshouse, Gateshead; **17 MAR** Stephen Joseph Theatre, Scarborough;**18 MAR** The Apex, Bury St Edmunds; **20 MAR** Lakeside Arts, Nottingham; **21 MAR** Kings Place, London; **22 MAR** Emsworth Baptist Church; **23 MAR** The Welfare, Swansea; **24 MAR** Hitchin Folk Club; **25 MAR** Cambridge Junction; **26 MAR** The Stables, Milton Keynes; **27 MAR** Wiltshire Music Centre, Bradford-on-Avon; **28 MAR** Selby Town Hall; **29 MAR** Alnwick Playhouse. *philcunningham.com*

BCUC
Ritualistic sounds from Soweto

12 MAR Clwb Ifor Bach, Cardiff; **13-14 MAR** The Jam Jar, Bristol; **15 MAR** The Cornish Bank, Falmouth; **15 MAR** The Welfare, Swansea; **16 MAR** Foundry, Sheffield; **17 MAR** Stereo, Glasgow; **18 MAR** The Crescent, York; **20 MAR** Norwich Arts Centre; **21 MAR** Ramona, Manchester; **22 MAR** Cobalt Studios, Newcastle upon Tyne; **23 MAR** Brighton Dome; **26 MAR** [+ Chesaba] Barbican, London. *bcuc.bandcamp.com*

Blazin' Fiddles
Six fiery Scottish fiddleS

2 MAR Maltings, Berwick-upon-Tweed; **3 MAR** Music Room, Liverpool; **4 MAR** Kings Place, London; **5 MAR** Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury; **6 MAR** The Stables, Milton Keynes; **7 MAR** St James' Church, Emsworth; **8 MAR** Selby Town Hall; **9 MAR** Reid Hall, Forfar; **10 MAR** St Margaret's, Braemar. *blazinfiddles.com*

The Brothers Gillespie
Northumbrian acoustic duo

11 MAR Lowther Pavilion, Lytham St Annes; **15 MAR** Folk at the Barlow, Oldham; **16 MAR** The Vale, Mossley; **17 MAR** Cafe#9, Sheffield; **20 MAR** Carrington Triangle Folk Club, Nottingham; **21 MAR** Stratford Folk Club, Stratford upon Avon; **22 MAR** Square Chapel, Halifax; **23 MAR** Llanbrynmair House Concert; **24 MAR** The Anvil, Basingstoke; **27 MAR** Cramlington Folk Club; **28 MAR** Horse + Bamboo, Rossendale. *thebrothersgillespie.com*

Jim Causley
Songs from the West Country

2 MAR The Ockment Centre, Okehampton; **3 MAR** Crediton Library; **6 MAR** Overton Folk Club; **15 MAR** Valley Folk Club, Pontardawe; **16 MAR** Stockland Village Hall; **17 MAR** Devon Folk Day, Morchard Bishop; **24 MAR** St Mary's Handbridge Centre, Chester; **25 MAR** The Prince Albert, Stroud. *jimcausley.co.uk*

Sidiki Dembélé
Master djembé player with band

2 MAR Riverside, Newcastle upon Tyne; **3 MAR** La Belle Angele, Edinburgh; **4 MAR** Slay, Glasgow; **6 MAR** Sidney & Matilda, Sheffield; **7 MAR** Belgrave Music Hall, Leeds; **8 MAR** Mama Roux's, Birmingham; **16 MAR** Band on the Wall, Manchester; **17 MAR** Lost Horizon, Bristol; **19 MAR** Jazz Cafe, London; **20 MAR** Invisible Wind Factory, Liverpool; **21 MAR** The Globe, Cardiff; **26 MAR** [with Chesaba] Barbican, London. *throughthenoise.co.uk*

Fairport Convention
With support from PLUMHALL

2 MAR The Grand Pavilion, Matlock Bath; **3 MAR** Stratford Playhouse; **5 MAR** William Aston Hall, Wrexham; **6 MAR** Castle Hall, Bridgnorth; **7 MAR** Theatr Brycheiniog, Brecon; **8 MAR** The Roses, Tewkesbury; **9 MAR** Union Chapel, London; **10 MAR** Dudley Town Hall. *fairportconvention.com*

Heather Ferrier Trio
Rising star of the accordion

14 MAR Ludlow Distillery; **15 MAR** The Jam Factory, Hereford; **16 MAR** Violet's Tea Room, Bridgnorth; **18 MAR** Green Note, London; **22 MAR** Bobiks, Newcastle upon Tyne. *heatherferriermusic.com*

Gipsy Kings
Rare dates from legendary band

18 MAR Olympia Theatre, Dublin; **20 MAR** Usher Hall, Edinburgh; **21 MAR** Sage Gateshead; **23 MAR** Symphony Hall, Birmingham; **24 MAR** Bristol Beacon; **26 MAR** The Bridgewater Hall, Manchester; **27 MAR** Brighton Dome; **28 MAR** Royal Albert Hall, London. *nicolasreyes.com*

Cerys Hafana
Young Welsh triple harpist

9 MAR Le Pub, Newport; **10 MAR** The Barrelhouse, Totnes; **17 MAR** Abair, Dublin; **19 MAR** The Courtyard, Hereford; **20 MAR** Chameleon Arts Café, Nottingham; **21 MAR** [+ Emily Portman & Ron Harbron] Howard

Gig Guide

Assembly Room, Leeds; **22 MAR** The Met, Bury. *ceryshafana.com*

Harbottle & Jonas
Intimate English folk duo
2 MAR West Stafford Village Hall; **3 MAR** Ibberton Village Hall; **8 MAR** Wassail Prune!, The Newt in Somerset, Castle Cary; **15 MAR** Lerryn Memorial Hall; **23 MAR** Townshend Village Hall. *harbottleandjonas.com*

Kit Hawes & Aaron Catlow
Weaving fiddle, guitar and voice
2 MAR Bristol Folk House; **3 MAR** The Prince Albert, Stroud; **4 MAR** Green Note, London; **6 MAR** Cramlington Folk Club; **7 MAR** Black Swan Folk Club, York; **9 MAR** Hyde Tavern, Winchester; **10 MAR** Café#9, Sheffield; **11 MAR** Glenfarg Folk Club; **13 MAR** Willows Folk Club, Preston; **14 MAR** Crail Folk Club, Fife; **15 MAR** The Argyle & Cellar Bar, Edinburgh. *kitandaaron.com*

Fay Hield
Exploring the English tradition
3 APR The Slaughtered Lamb, London; **4 APR** The Treehouse Bookshop, Kenilworth; **5 APR** Gullivers, Manchester; **6 APR** Wychwood Folk Club, Ascott-under-Wychwood; **7 APR** Hare & Hounds, Birmingham; **8 APR** Grove Folk Club, Leeds. *fayhield.com*

Hannah James & Toby Kuhn
Fables of darkness and light
9 MAR The Greystones, Sheffield; **10 MAR** Temperance, Leamington Spa; **13 MAR** The Stables, Milton Keynes; **14 MAR** The Spring, Havant; **15 MAR** Downend Folk & Roots, Bristol; [online gig] Live to Your Living Room; **16 MAR** Lighthouse, Poole; **19 MAR** The Fleece Inn, Bretforton; **21 MAR** Cecil Sharp House, London; **22 MAR** Pound Arts, Corsham; **23 MAR** Hasland Methodist Church, Chesterfield. *hannahtobymusic.org*

N'famady Kouyaté
Balafon player from Guinea
8 MAR Aberystwyth Arts Centre; **9 MAR** Pontardawe Arts Centre, Swansea; **14 MAR** Thekla, Bristol; **15 MAR** The Moon, Cardiff; **16 MAR** The Jago, London; **21 MAR** Green Door Store, Brighton; **22 MAR** Tŷ Pawb, Wrexham; **23 MAR** Music Room, Liverpool. *nfamady.com*

Sam Lee
Presents his album songdreaming
15 MAR The Met, Bury; **16 MAR** Summerhall, Edinburgh; **17 MAR** The Trades Club, Hebden Bridge; **20 MAR** Crookes Social Club, Sheffield; **21 MAR** Storey's Field Centre, Cambridge; **22 MAR** Brewery Arts, Kendal; **23 MAR** The Glasshouse, Gateshead; **24 MAR** Old Woollen, Leeds; **26 MAR** Norwich Arts Centre; **27 MAR** Beacon, Bristol; **28 MAR** Music Room, Liverpool; **3 APR** Komedia, Brighton; **4 APR** Quarterhouse, Folkestone; **5 APR** St Mary's Church, Totnes; **6 APR** The Gate, Cardiff; **7 APR** Turner Sims, Southampton. *samleesong.co.uk*

London Afrobeat Collective
Explosive new album, Esengo
6 MAR The Crescent, York; **7 MAR** Ramona, Manchester; **8 MAR** Cobalt Studios, Newcastle upon Tyne; **9 MAR** Brudenell Social Club, Leeds; **23 MAR** Bristol Beacon; **30 MAR** The Lower Third, London. *lacband.co.uk*

Daniel Martinez
And his Flamenco Company
2 MAR Gloucester Guildhall; **7 MAR** Middlesbrough Theatre; **8 MAR** Octagon Centre, Sheffield; **9 MAR** Turner Sims, Southampton; **10 MAR** Exeter Corn Exchange; **14 MAR** Preston Playhouse; **15 MAR** Town Hall, Birmingham; **16 MAR** Hull Truck Theatre; **17 MAR** City Varieties Music Hall, Leeds; **27 APR** Northern Stage, Newcastle upon Tyne; **28 APR** Sheldonian Theatre, Oxford. *danielmartinezflamenco.com*

Rachael McShane
And her band The Cartographers
2 MAR Spring Bank Arts, New Mills; **3 MAR** The Cumberland Arms, Newcastle upon Tyne; **5 MAR** Temperance, Leamington Spa; **6 MAR** The Fleece Inn, Bretforton; **7 MAR** St George's Bristol; **8 MAR** Ruskin Mill, Stroud; **9 MAR** St Edith Folk, Cranbrook; **10 MAR** Riverhouse Barn, Walton-on-Thames. *rachaelmcshane.co.uk*

John McSherry Trio
Exponent of the uilleann pipes
13 MAR Strange Brew, Bristol; **14 MAR** Brewery Arts, Kendal; **16 MAR** [+ Jack Warnock] Irish Cultural Centre, London; **17 MAR** Band on the Wall, Manchester; **18 MAR** Prince Albert, Stroud. *johnmcsherry.com*

Angeline Morrison
Folksongs of Black Britain
2 MAR More Music, Morecambe; **3 MAR** Storyhouse, Chester; **6 MAR** Yellow Arch Studios, Sheffield; **7 MAR** Hub at St Mary's, Lichfield; **8 MAR** [with Daudi Matsiko] Strange Brew, Bristol; **9 MAR** RWCMD, Cardiff; **16 MAR** The Lab, Northampton; **17 MAR** Black Fen Folk Club, Cambridge; **21 MAR** The Bear Club, Luton; **22 MAR** Kings Place, London; **23 MAR** West Hill Hall, Brighton; **6 APR** [online gig] Live To Your Living Room; **24 APR** Exeter Library. *angelinemorrisonmusic.com*

Ninebarrow
Mesmerising vocal harmonies
2 MAR The Goods Shed, Tetbury; **7 MAR** St Leonard's Church, Sheepstor; **8 MAR** St Mark's Church, Woodcote; **9 MAR** Melbourne Assembly Rooms, Derby; **13 MAR** Ely Folk Club, Haddenham; **14 MAR** South Luffenham Village Hall; **15 MAR** Harwell Village Hall, Didcot. *ninebarrow.co.uk*

Emily Portman & Rob Harbron
Two leading lights of folk
21 MAR [+ Cerys Hafana] Howard Assembly Room, Leeds; **22 MAR** The Music Institute Folk Club; Guildford; **24 MAR** TwickFolk, London; **25 MAR** Colchester Arts Centre; **26 MAR** Dartford Folk Club; **27 MAR** The Spring, Havant; **29 MAR** Bridgwater Arts Centre. *emilyandrob.uk*

The Rheingans Sisters
Playful, powerful and poignant
4 APR Connaught Theatre, Worthing; **5 APR** Blackheath Halls, London; **7 APR** Widcombe Social Club, Bath; **10 APR** Cuffern Manor, Haverfordwest; **11 APR** The Art Shop & Chapel, Abergavenny; **13 APR** The Heron Theatre, Beetham. *rheinganssisters.co.uk*

Salt House
Three brilliant folk artists
6 MAR Resolis Community Arts, Black Isle; **8 MAR** Arc, Winchester; **9 MAR** Strode Theatre, Street; **10 MAR** Peggy's Skylight, Nottingham; **13 MAR** Hilltop Sessions, Lewes; **14 MAR** Town Hall, Middlesbrough; **15 MAR** Old Parcels Office, Scarborough; **16 MAR** The Witham, Barnard Castle; **17 MAR** Strathearn Arts Space, Crieff. *salthousemusic.com*

George Sansome & Matt Quinn
Guitar, mandolin and vocal duo
12 MAR The Harrison, Kings Cross; **13 MAR** Hambledon Folk Club; **14 MAR** Lyceum Folk & Acoustic Club, Newport; **16 MAR** Michinhampton Market House; **17 MAR** Stanstead Abbotts Concert Society; **19 MAR** St Neots Folk Club; **20 MAR** Cafe#9, Sheffield. *mattquinnmusic.com*

São Paulo Dance Company
Classical and Latin dance fusion
1-2 MAR Hull New Theatre; **5-6 MAR** Theatre Royal, Newcastle upon Tyne; **8-9 MAR** Alhambra Theatre, Bradford; **12-13 MAR** The Lowry, Salford Quays; **15-16 MAR** Wolverhampton Grand Theatre; **19-20 MAR** Eden Court, Inverness; **22-23 MAR** Theatre Royal Norwich. *danceconsortium.com*

Spiers & Boden
The originators of Bellowhead
2 MAR Wiltshire Music Centre, Bradford-on-Avon; **3 MAR** mac, Birmingham; **4 MAR** Maddermarket Theatre, Norwich; **13 MAR** Exeter Phoenix; **14 MAR** Theatr Mwldan, Cardigan; **15 MAR** Taliesin Arts Centre, Swansea; **17 MAR** Pavilion Arts Centre, Buxton; **18 MAR** Queen's Hall, Hexham; **19 MAR** Cast, Doncaster; **10 APR** Theatre Royal, Winchester; **11 APR** Norden Farm, Maidenhead; **12 APR** The Y Theatre, Leicester; **13 APR** The Mill, Banbury; **15 APR** Colchester Arts Centre; **16 APR** St Andrew's Church, Hertford. *spiersandboden.com*

Sam Sweeney Band
Another wonder of Bellowhead
6 MAR Acapella, Cardiff; **7 MAR** Treehouse, Frome; **8 MAR** Ludlow Assembly Rooms; **9 MAR** The Haymarket, Basingstoke; **10 MAR** The Lantern, Bristol; **11 MAR** Colchester Arts Centre; **12 MAR** The Crescent, York; **13 MAR** Lakeside Arts, Nottingham; **14 MAR** Band on the Wall, Manchester; **15 MAR** Bullingdon Oxford; **16 MAR** Moth Club, London; **17 MAR** Hare and Hounds, Birmingham. *samsweeneymusic.com*

The Wilderness Yet
Superb trio of talent
15 MAR The Song Loft, Stony Stratford; **16 MAR** Seaford Little Theatre; **17 MAR** The Water Rats, London; **21 MAR** Tree House Bookshop, Kenilworth; **22 MAR** Norwegian Church Arts Centre, Cardiff; **24 MAR** St Saviour's Church, St Albans. *thewildernessyet.com*

Chris Wood
Storytelling songs at their finest
7 MAR The Art House, Southampton; **8 MAR** Kalamazoo Klub, London; **12 MAR** The Kitchen Garden Café, Birmingham; **13 MAR** Cramlington Folk Club; **14 MAR** The Trades Club, Hebden Bridge; **15 MAR** Sheep Dip Sessions, Harbury; **16 MAR** West Malvern Social Club, Malvern; **21 MAR** John Wesley's New Room, Bristol; **22 MAR** The Greystones, Sheffield; **24 MAR** Lewes Con Club. *chriswoodmusic.co.uk*

NORWAY

3–7 July 2024

førdefestivalen

THEME:

ROOTS

Full lineup to be released on the 4th of April

fordefestival.no

@fordefestival

To plan your stay, visit **fjordnorway.com**

Illustration: Piotr Pucyło - Design Universe

First line up announcement

SHREWSBURY FOLK FESTIVAL

23-24-25-26 AUG 2024

Mary Black

Eric Bibb · Ward Thomas

Mànran · The Longest Johns

The Sentimentals & friends

El Pony Pisador · Le Vent du Nord

Dream in Colors · Ranagri

Suntou Susso Band · Nati

Joshua Burnell Band · Joli Blon

James Delarre & Saul Rose

Rosie Hood Band · The Hunch · The 309s

Winter Wilson · The Lost Notes

Patakas · Dan the Hat

And many more headliners to come!

Dance: Banter · Cri du Canard

Crowdy Kit · Dancing Mister

EFDSS Ceilidh Band

Monster Ceilidh Band

James Delarre, Saul Rose & Dave Delarre

Tom Moore & Archie Churchill-Moss

Spiers & Boden

Steamchicken

The Oakstone Trio

- Ceilidhs
- Morris & dance teams
- Workshops
- Singarounds & sessions
- Craft fair
- Food village
- Camping & glamping
- Real ale, wine & cocktail bars

P@ndemonium! Children's Festival

refolkus Youth Festival

- Payment plan available

Day & Weekend Tickets

shrewsburyfolkfestival.co.uk

APRIL–MAY 2024

Festival Guide

Ralph McTell at TradFest with Declan O'Rourke, Tom Paxton, The Dubliners' John Sheahan and Lúnasa

Killian Broderick

REVIEW

TradFest
Dublin, Ireland
January 24-28

TradFest, Ireland's largest trad and folk music festival, returned for its 19th year, and as with previous years, it delivered another stimulating, glorious and utterly joyful celebration of Irish music and culture. Spanning five days, 18 venues and featuring over 50 acts, workshops, talks and kids events, the festival provided a rich weekend of music, dance and conversation, all centred around the famously bustling Temple Bar area of Dublin, though with some festivities extending beyond the city limits to the wider county of Fingal, offering additional sessions and events.

The festival presented a diverse range of acts, catering to those seeking the best of traditional Irish music as well as those interested in more eclectic offerings. Trad highlights included performances by Altan, Paddy Keenan, Julie Fowlis and a tribute to the songs of Janis Ian featuring Mary Black, Aoife Scott and Nuala Kennedy.

A treat was the legendary Ralph McTell who commanded the National Stadium stage, joined by guests Declan O'Rourke, Lúnasa and Tom Paxton. Actor Stephen Rea also contributed a haunting spoken word piece as part of a special musical composition by Neil Martin, commemorating the 170th-anniversary of the sinking of the *RMS Tayleur*.

Canadian singer-songwriter Allison Russell, with special guest Hozier, delivered an electric performance in the stunning atmosphere of St Patrick's Cathedral, while Mairéad Ní Mhaonaigh, Alison Brown, Aoife O'Donovan, Eileen Ivers and The Friel Sisters gifted the audience with an exhilarating evening celebrating *Transatlantic Women*. Steo Wall's curated gig at Castle Hall, which reflected on the vitality and legacy of Irish Traveller culture, and featured music from Niamh Dunne, Sharyn Ward and Wall himself, was an inspiration.

Emerging performers such as Brigid Mae Power, Toshín and Padraig Jack also left a lasting impression, adding to the festival's extensive line-up.

It's clear from the varied lineup that at the festival's heart is variety; it was a pretty fluid programme the organisers served. The appeal of the festival was not limited to the organised gigs either; Dublin being Dublin, the city had music pouring out of its pubs wherever you strolled – especially true of Temple Bar. Spend time walking in the city too, and you are following the ghosts of Jonathan Swift, Oscar Wilde, Mary Wollstonecraft, James Joyce (check out Sweny's Pharmacy where you might catch a reading of Joyce's work or an impromptu singalong) and, of course, Molly Malone. Add in the musical links to The Dubliners (grab a Guinness or three at O'Donoghue's Bar where the band originated in the 1960s), U2, The Cranberries, The Chieftains and more, and you have a city spoilt with musical riches.

For anyone with a taste for traditional Irish music and culture but keen to explore the sheer diversity and exhilaration of emerging global artists more broadly, TradFest is for you. Add in the unique atmosphere of Dublin itself and you experience something rather special.

Next year, the festival's 20th anniversary, is already promising to be an event not to be missed. Tradfest, and Dublin, I'll be back. Until then, *sláinte*.

BILLY ROUGH

LISTINGS

April 2-6
Music Current
Dublin, Ireland
musiccurrent.ie

April 11-13
Budapest Ritmo
Budapest, Hungary
budapestritmo.hu/en

April 11-14
Fiddle Hell
Online
Since going online during the pandemic, this fiddle fest has found its home, this year boasting 170 live workshops, 25 concerts and 25 live jam sessions, available to all.
fiddlehell.org

April 12-14
A Tapestry of Sacred Music
Singapore
esplanade.com/tapestry

April 12-14 & 19-21
Coachella
Indio, CA, US
coachella.com

April 25 – May 1
Costa Festival Ibiza
Ibiza, Spain
costafestival.co.uk

April 26-28
Welcome in Tziganie
Seissan, France
welcome-in-tziganie.com

May 2-5
Shetland Folk Festival
Shetland
shetlandfolkfestival.com

May 3-13
TradFest
Edinburgh
edinburghtradfest.com

May 3 – June 2
Brighton Fringe
Brighton
brightonfringe.org

May 4-26
Brighton Festival
Brighton
brightonfestival.org

May 6-12
Gypsy Jazz Festival of London
London
futurefable.com/gypsyjazz2024

May 10-26
Norfolk & Norwich Festival
Norfolk
nnfestival.org.uk

May 15-18
The Great Escape
Brighton
greatescapefestival.com

May 15-22
Afro-Pfingsten
Winterthur, Switzerland
afro-pfingsten.ch

May 17-19
Festival des Musiciens du Monde
Montreal, Canada
centredesmusiciens dumonde.com

May 17-26
The Bath Festival
Bath, Somerset
bathfestivals.org.uk/the-bath-festival

May 18-20
Music Meeting Festival
Nijmegen, The Netherlands
Ngulmiya, Bab L' Bluz, Ali Doğan Gönültaş, SARĀB and the Indonesian National Orchestra are all part of a stellar line-up.
musicmeeting.nl

May 23-26
Druga Godba
Ljubljana & Maribor, Slovenia
drugagodba.si/en/festival

May 23-26
Knockengorroch World Ceilidh
Knockengorroch
knockengorroch.org.uk

May 23-26
Orkney Folk Festival
Orkney
orkneyfolkfestival.com

May 23-26
Shindig Festival
Dillington Park Estate, Ilminster, Somerset
shindigfestival.co.uk

May 24-27
Chippenham Folk Festival
Chippenham, Wiltshire
chippfolk.co.uk

May 24 – June 9
Bath Fringe
Bath, Somerset
bathfringe.co.uk

May 25-26
East Durham Irish Festival
East Durham, NY, US
eastdurhamirishfestival.com

May 25 – June 3
Fleadh Nua
Ennis, Co. Clare, Ireland
One of Ireland's most loved folk festivals is celebrating 50 years so expect lots of *céilithe*, pub sessions, concerts and more as Fleadh Nua takes over Ennis for ten days.
fleadhnua.com

May 29 – June 2
Primavera Sound + Primavera Pro
Barcelona, Spain
primaverasound.com

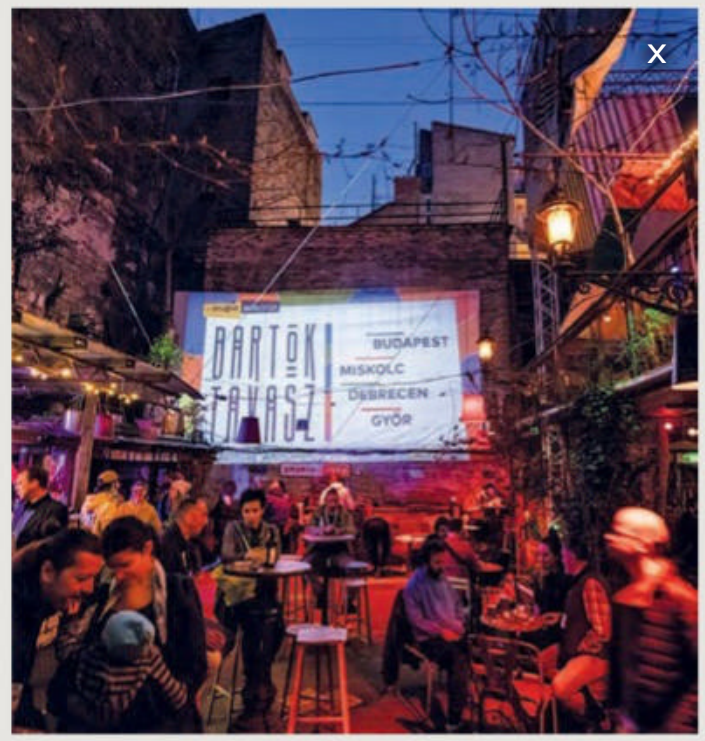
May 30 – June 2
Africa Festival
Würzburg, Germany
africafestival.org/en

May 30 – June 3
Fire in the Mountain
Near Aberystwyth, Ceredigion
fireinthemountain.co.uk

May 31 – June 2
MTN Bushfire
Malkerns, Eswatini
bush-fire.com

May 31 – June 2
Wychwood Festival
Cheltenham
wychwoodfestival.com

**ALL EVENTS ARE UK UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED*



Nagy Attila Mupa

PREVIEW

Budapest Ritmo

WHEN: April 11-13

WHERE: Budapest, Hungary

What the festival says:
'Budapest Ritmo brings roots and rhythms, multiple genres, fusion styles, and unexpected cultural mixes to the heart of Budapest. Global lineup meets local talent, with Ritmo's range growing each year: a showcase stage, a conference, networking events, screenings and afterparties all geared to inspire and connect. High energy, deep emotions – discover your new favourite sound at Budapest Ritmo!'

What we said:
About the 2022 edition: *'One of the things that marks out Budapest Ritmo is the special collaborations they have created for the festival, like the virtuoso Hungarian violinist Lajkó Félix with Polish string band VOŁOSI, or the Amsterdam Klezmer Band with Hungarian tambura group Söndörgő. These have been very exciting, bringing new and inventive ingredients to bands already successful in their own right – with great verve and virtuosity.'*

Who's playing?
It's fair to say they've got some big hitters lined-up with Gaye Su Akyol, BCUC and Salif Keita among the headliners. Though, with this being Budapest Ritmo, sometimes the most excitement is found in the one-off collaborations, such as Hungary's Terne Čhave joining forces with Czechians Romano Drom to celebrate 25 years of the latter group, or the meeting of jazz multi-instrumentalist Béla Ágoston and *kaval* player Theodosii Spassov. Vincent Moon's live cinematic backing to Dalinda's a capella Hungarian folk should be another highlight.

ONLINE: budapestritmo.hu

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& JUNE TABOR
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THU 3 BIRMINGHAM TOWN HALL
FRI 4 BRISTOL BEACON
SAT 5 BEXHILL DE LA WARR PAVILION
SAT 12 MANCHESTER RNCM CONCERT HALL
SUN 13 SUNDERLAND THE FIRE STATION
TUE 15 LEICESTER DE MONTFORT HALL
SAT 19 LONDON BARBICAN
MORE INFO/TICKETS: ALONGLONGGOODBYE.LIVE

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Bukahara // GER
Emma Langford // IRL
Paula Carolina // GER
Wanderer Songs: The Music of José Afonso // POR+
Krakauer & Tagg's Mazel Tov Party // USA
BCUC // SAF
Mart'nália // BRA
Jugendfolkorchester // GER
Vlado Kreslin // SLO
Niyaz // IRN/USA ...
www.rudolstadt-festival.de tickets: www.tixforgigs.com

DRUGA GODBA
International Music Festival
40
Ljubljana, Slovenia
May 23–26, 2024
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Angélica Garcia
Brìghde Chaimbeul
Borka & Bos
Danyèl Waro feat. Interzone
Hatis Noit
Hiram Salsano
Ibrahim Maalouf & The Trumpets of Michel-Ange
Lenhart Tapes
Mats Gustafsson & Kimmo Pohjonen
Ndox Electrique
Pankisi Ensemble
Rudi Bučar Trio
Ustad Noor Bakhsh
Zoc
drugagodba.si

Left and Right: Los Tigres del Norte performing at Berkeley Folk Music Festival, 1970; Centre: a flyer for the festival advertising Los Tigres del Norte's performance

Los Tigres del Norte emerged in the 1960s with a new take on Mexican storytelling. Their tales of migration and hardship have become increasingly relevant with every passing year

The world of Los Tigres del Norte is one where death is the punchline and betrayal emerges as the only option for survival. They are not the most obvious themes for a group to win over the world with, but that's exactly what Los Tigres have achieved, becoming *the* Mexican group inside and outside their homeland with *corridos* full of drama and romance led by fearless characters with big hearts and some bad friends.

Corridos are story songs or narrative ballads, with the oldest known being written in 1811 in Zacatecas. When Los Tigres del Norte began releasing music in 1968, the so-called 'golden era of the recorded corrido' (1928-1937) was well and truly over, and soon a new variant on the style would emerge that angered the purists. Luis, the youngest of the Hernández brothers to join Los Tigres del Norte (he did so in 1996), talks about the group's beginnings and first hit: "'Camelia' [the colloquial name for 1973's 'Contrabando y Traición'] took Los Tigres to the next level, it was recorded here in San José, California, and was mostly played and sold at flea markets, known in Mexico as *tianguis*." 'Contrabando y Traición' tells the story of Emilio and Camelia La Tejana who journey together from Mexico through the US border with a large amount of marijuana, delivering it successfully in Los Angeles. Once there, Emilio tells Camelia he's leaving her for his true love. It doesn't end well. Camelia shoots him seven times and runs away with the money.

Luis says that Los Tigres broke into the US market through artisanal means: "Arthur Walker, producer of Los Tigres, also took on the duties of pressman for 'Camelia' and that work was done mostly hand to hand, that's why it started winning people over and got the group offers to play in San Diego and then out of state. Los Tigres first became successful in the United States and then in Mexico, something rather unusual. We are always surprised when we play the song live because everybody sings it, from children to older people. Women sing it louder, because they feel empowered through the main character."

Luis' first encounter with Los Tigres was at the movies: "My first memory related to Los Tigres del Norte is hearing 'La Banda del Carro Rojo' [which] was made into a movie. I am the youngest in the family, so my mamma took me to see it… I was nervous to see my brothers in a motion picture."

The Hernández brothers started playing music together in Sinaloa, Mexico when their father woke up one day in 1965 and couldn't move his legs due to nerve problems. The brothers, along with their cousin Óscar Lara, started playing music to raise funds for an operation. One day they were propositioned to play in a prison north of the border. On the way a migration officer, asking for their artistic name, christened them *Los Tigritos* (the little tigers) because he thought they would be big. He changed it to *Los Tigres* (the tigers) when he reasoned they would grow up one day. *Del Norte* was added purely as they were heading north.

When Luis asked his brothers about Los Tigres' first big show, they remembered one in California: "When my brothers talk about this subject, there is a show done in Berkeley, a big festival [the Berkeley Folk Music Festival, 1970]. That was the first time they felt the response of a huge audience singing and dancing to their original tunes. I think that type of experience pushed them to keep at it."

If Los Tigres are an authoritative voice for stories around migration into the US, that's because they've experienced it: "We have all been in the US with an illegal migration status at some point," says Luis. "I came as a student, but my visa expired. I never made the trip across the border without papers, but we know that border perfectly. All of us brothers have stories to tell about the people that make that journey into this country, in search of the American Dream and to help those back home. We know perfectly the necessities of our people in the US and we are realising that Europe has had the same complication… The border has many stories from so many friends, some are known as '*polleros*', others as 'coyotes' [names given to those who facilitate people smuggling]. We know all kinds of people and that's the roots of our songs. Because of our experiences, we can deliver the message."

Even though the group was formed over half a century ago, social issues raised by Los Tigres, especially those related to how migrants are treated when they enter the US, keep repeating: "A song like 'Camelia' mentions she had drugs in the wheels of her car, and that is still going on. If a migrant crosses the border they will likely check the wheels of your vehicle… Real subjects never go out of fashion."

As told by Hernan Muleiro

***+ Los Tigres del Norte** will play at the Eventim Apollo, London on April 14 as part of La Linea 24*

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Eliza Carthy's NEWS OF THE WHIRL

Eliza contemplates what is gained, lost and remains the same as the UK looks to ratify its culture through UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage

Now if you were anything like me you may have spent at least some of lockdown shouting into a void, also known as trying to engage with Tories on Twitter about the value of the Arts to the UK. It wasn't just lockdown, of course. Old Oliver Dowden MP got it in the ear from me about UK artists being able to tour the EU post-Brexit, as did many others in the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).

Then the pandemic happened, and, when asked if he was telling artists to change profession, Rishi Sunak replied, "That is a fresh and new opportunity for people," adding that it's "what we should be doing." According to one government advert, '*Fatima [a ballerina]'s next job could be in cyber*,' and many keyboard warriors told us arts workers to '*get real jobs*.' Trying to justify the cultural, historical and ethnomusicological aspects of being a UK touring folk musician often feels like a hiding to nothing. When will those in power see what we bring to good old 'Cool Britannia'?

We've had recent support, in addition to recent petitions for EU visa-free travel to reduce the damage done to UK touring acts. In August 2023, the Independent Society of Musicians published their report on the music sector after Brexit, which showed that almost half of the respondents had '*less work in the EU after January 2021 than they did before Brexit*,' that over a quarter had none and some had left the industry altogether. There have been similar reports in *The Guardian* about the struggles UK musicians face ('Why Many Musicians Can No Longer Afford to Tour' by Michael Hann), Jeremy Corbyn writing an open letter in *Kerrang!* magazine ('The Government Must Act Now to Support Grassroots Music Venues'), and Melvyn Bragg speaking in the Lords, where he lamented that art "is still considered the cherry on the cake."

So, 21 years after the creation of the UNESCO Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage, the UK government is looking to do its own research into whether we in the UK, Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies have any intangible cultural heritage, whether it's worth ratifying and whether our ICH needs '*safeguarding*.'

Upon reading the government's blurb for this consultation I had questions. Ultimately, I should be very excited. Their list of goals is a little vague but reads like a wet dream of mine from 1998: everything I wanted the people in charge to understand about traditional music and culture from these islands and beyond and with no distinction between the Celtic nations, world music and the English.

Three DCMS-mounted roundtable discussions took place these past weeks of particular note, these focused on England, Oral Traditions and Expressions (including Folklore), and Performing Arts. They invited grassroots practitioners (though the way they went about it was somewhat problematic: our Goathland Plough Stots sword team only got word a week or so in advance) to declare their interest and what they thought made them eligible for inclusion in the database.

> **Justify[ing] being a folk musician often feels like a hiding to nothing**

The buzzwords in the UK's UNESCO guidance say that this is culture that should: be '*owned by people themselves*,' '*community-based*,' '*bottom-up*,' '*inclusive*,' '*respectful*'; '*help with intercultural dialogue*'; have '*evolved in response to [its] environments*' and '*contribute to giving us a sense of identity and continuity, providing a link from our past, through the present and into our future*.'

All this made me happy to start, but my cynicism and jadedness kicked in as I read on. Slogans from the UK government like '*commitment to the purpose of the Convention*' make you feel fantastic until you read the sentence at the end that states '*ratifying the Convention does not signal a commitment for any immediate action from the UK government, the devolved administrations, local government or associated public bodies*,' and that they won't list what they find with UNESCO.

Peter Craik is the Marketing and Communications Director at the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS), and I asked him to help me sort through it all. Is it a lot of prelude to a dissatisfactory non-answer? If there is no commitment, what is the process for? Will this have any impact on traditional events, professionals, cultural ambassadors, academics, anyone? What do we gain beyond a database? Will there be funding for amateur groups, promoters or clubs?

Peter says we simply don't know yet. He thinks it's unlikely that this is a political attempt to be a salve for Brexit, to win votes from people like us for a government on its last legs. I was hoping to be talked out of my knee-jerk negativity, but Peter had the same response. He did point out a couple of things we can take from this that may point to a positive future, however.

Firstly, the whole call for people to contribute is yet to come, the consultations were not the end of it. Peter's comments paraphrased here: "They seem to be open about their lack of expertise in this area. And until everything is in, we won't know the goal beyond having a database, which will in itself be useful, especially if it's a grassroots thing… The goals of safeguarding do not have boundaries; those countries that have ratified have often recognised the lack of physical borders in traditional cultural practice, so the best results have often come from countries that have collaborated with their neighbours." (Here I spit to myself about the B-word and the hostile environment.)

So, this is not a fait accompli: potentially it is the tip of a very interesting iceberg. They want to hear from us. ◆

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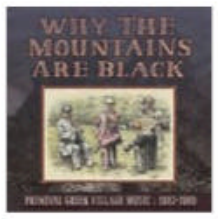
10

GREEK FOLK ALBUMS

Through its villages, cities and diaspora, ***Chris Wheatley*** finds ten albums that get to the emotional core of Greece's folk music



01 Various Artists
Why the Mountains are Black – Primeval Greek Village Music
(Third Man Records, 2016)

It may seem a non-intuitive step to connect rural folk with free jazz, yet that's exactly what we have here. This is wild, joyous music, almost ecstatic in approach, and never less than enthralling. To listen to this record is to step back into ancestral history. If that sounds like a grand statement, my only wish is that it inspires you to give this one a spin.

02 Domna Samiou
Songs of History and Heroes
(Greek Folk Music Association, 2007)

Renowned singer and researcher Domna Samiou set out to capture songs whose geneses lie in wars, battles and heroic deaths. The tunes collected date from the 13th century right up to WWII, and the music is as poignant as you might expect, from simply presented laments to full ensemble pieces featuring mesmerising choral voices.

03 Marika Papagika
Greek Popular and Rebetic Music in New York 1918-1929
(Alma Criolla, 1994)

A pioneer, Papagika was born on the island of Kos in 1890 and emigrated to America in 1915, where she opened a nightclub in New York, one of the first such establishments to serve Greek cuisine and music. Papagika has been labelled one of the most talented performers of Greek folk ever recorded and this collection amply displays her charm.

04 Nikos Xylouris & Yannis Markopoulos
Rizitika
(Columbia, 1971)

Singer, composer and player of the Cretan harp Nikos Xylouris remains one of the most beloved and successful artists in his country's history. Violinist and composer Markopoulos is no less notable. Combining classical, modern and traditional Greek music, and ranging from mournful ballads to stirring dances, *Rizitika* (Roots), is a rare beauty.

05 Giorgos Koros
Byzantine Hymns
(FM Records, 1997)

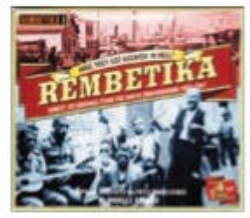
Giorgos Koros recorded more than 1,200 pieces of music during his lifetime, earning many gold and platinum discs. Born on the island of Evia, the son of a cantor, Koros was self-taught and grew up surrounded by Byzantine music. With this album, he transports us wholeheartedly to that ancient world. The thread which binds this wonderful music is the sound of Koros' violin, which 'sings' with remarkable grace.

06 Amalia Bakas
Amalia! Old Greek Songs in the New Land 1923-1950
(Arhoolie Records, 2002)

Amalia Bakas emigrated to America in 1912, at the age of 15, where she began performing in the nightclubs of New York City. During her career, she toured with popular singer George Katsaros and collaborated with fellow NYC resident Marika Papagika. Despite the far-from-perfect audio quality of these tracks, Bakas' undeniable talent shines. Her voice is pure and bright, communicating a striking level of emotion.

07 Mikis Theodorakis
People's Music: The Struggles of the Greek People
(Folkways, 1970)

Theodorakis will be familiar to many as the composer of soundtracks to the films *Zorba the Greek* and *Z*. This collection shares its spirit with the latter movie, paying tribute to Greek democratic martyrs and their struggles. The compositions, arrangements and performances are first class. Despite its serious subject, this is a record which both charms and delights.



08 Various Artists
Have They Got Hashish in Hell? Rembetika Rarest Recordings from the Greek Underground 1920-57
(JSP, 2012)

Rebetika (also spelt *rembetika*) refers to a type of folk music which originated among the poorest level of society in Greece's urban areas during the 19th century. Taken from the personal stash of collector Charles Howard, the astonishing tracks here span four decades, but are united in spirit. You'll find a variety of voices and styles, but each piece delivers a rare and wonderful sense of aliveness.

09 Elenis & Athanasiou
Greek Folk Dances
(Monitor Records, 1989)

Described as a '*fireball*' of a *bouzouki* player, Takis Elenis is joined here by singer Anestos Athanasiou to explore a wide selection of folk dances drawn from across the islands of Greece. These dances celebrate weddings, harvests, holidays and a wide variety of festivals. They run the spectrum from slow and solemn to wildly energetic, and every number is a compelling adventure.

10 Manos Achalinotopoulos
Zopirin
(Universal, 2010)

Modern great Manos Achalinotopoulos has proven himself a master on the clarinet, *kaval* (chromatic flute) and medieval *shawm* (double-reed woodwind). On *Zopirin*, which features a slew of notable guest stars, Achalinotopoulos guides the listener along a mesmeric journey which takes in gently unwinding soundscapes, atmospheric choral pieces and riotous walls of sound.

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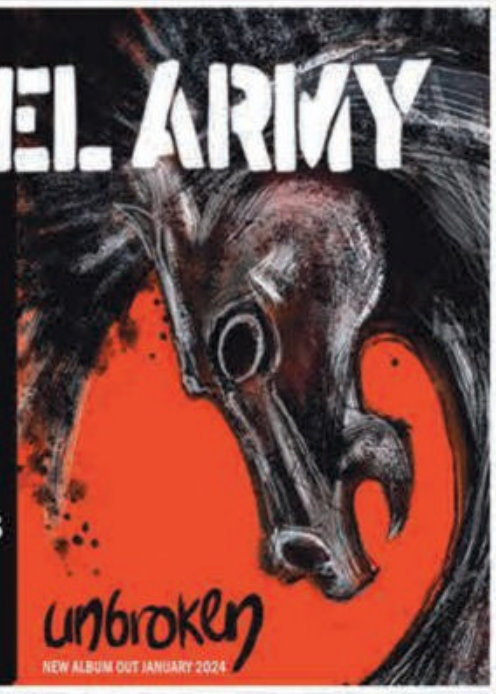

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